



Living Faithfully

Participant Resource

*Norma Cook Everist
Nelvin Vos*



Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Unit One
The Ten Commandments

1

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General Introduction

Where is God, anyway? And what exactly is God doing?

Many of us as children probably thought that God was located about three feet above the altar or in some other spot in the church building. The writer of Psalm 139 discovered that God was everywhere. "If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me" (verses 9-10).

By taking part in a *Connections* group, you have also begun a process of discovery. *Connections* is about discovery of God, of God's worlds and of God's people.

Connections: Faith and Life unfolds the many worlds God is creating and redeeming. It is a discovery of God at work in the world, especially in your life and in the lives of others who participate. It is an experience in getting to know God better.

There's a saying that you don't really know people until you have visited them where they live. In your *Connections* group, you will actually visit members of the group in their homes, in their places of work, in the neighborhoods in which they live or in their places of leisure or recreation. You will see people in new ways as you see how they live and relate to others in the worlds God is creating and redeeming for them.

Through *Connections*, you will get to know yourself better and begin to recognize and understand how your life is a ministry. You will also come to a fresh and better understanding of the faith as you observe how it relates to your occupation, your place of recreation, your community and your home. The familiar words of the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed and the liturgy for the Eucharist will be explored as they relate to your everyday world. The Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed will be studied and applied to the decisions you make and to the life-and-death issues you face.

And you will get to know Martin Luther better. As you study *The Large Catechism* and discuss it in the worlds you visit, you will observe how he dealt with his worlds when he came face to face with God. You will recognize that his world was not very different from yours today.



About This Book

This participant resource contains questions, highlights from Luther's writings, session references and notes. It is not a textbook as such, but rather a collection of readings and learning activities with some space for your writings and reflections. The participant resource is where you can think about and record your experiences. In addition to containing the session material, the participant resource is a private place where you can insert anything you wish, in effect creating your own resource.

So let the discovery begin – the discovery of God, of God's worlds and of yourself in growth and prayer.

Introduction

This course is about the relationship between faith and life. The real curriculum for this experience is life: your life and the lives of others in the group. *Connections* focuses on your day-to-day experiences: your joys, concerns, activities and issues. The purpose is to help you and other participants notice the worlds God is creating, saving and making holy all around you.

Unit One focuses on living faithfully. It centers on important personal issues and questions of life. Through a study of the Ten Commandments, you will explore these matters:

- What is important in my life?
- How do I keep going?
- How do I live faithfully with others?
- How do I live in dangerous times?
- What's the truth about lying?
- Do I want too much?

In this unit you will engage in activities like reading, discussing, personal sharing, writing and imagining. You will participate in at least one off-site visit — a chance to see the worlds of members of your group. Above all, you will find new voices in your life, new ways to see the world and new directions for your sense of mission.

And in all these activities you will meet God, working alongside you in the worlds you inhabit. In prayer you will find God there with you, and draw strength from the knowledge that God stays with you throughout each day.



Session One

What's Important in My Life?

Identity: Ours and God's The First and Second Commandments

Going to the Heart of the Matter

Who am I? What are my worlds like?
What's important in my life?

Our goals, our God and our gods shape the way we live our daily lives. Throughout the *Connections* program we attempt to connect our daily lives with our faith.

In this session, we examine the First and Second Commandments:

**You are to have no other gods.
You are not to misuse the name
of your God.**

Choose as a partner someone in the group that you do not know well. Ask each other the following:

- What is your name?
- What do you do?
- How do you describe yourself?

You have about 10 minutes to discuss these questions.

After this time, rejoin the group. Introduce your partner. These introductions should include the other person's name and a brief description of that person.

Getting
Acquainted

Beginning Where We Are

Spend about five minutes reflecting on the following questions. Jot down your responses in the space that follows.

● Where do you spend your time on an average day?

● To whom do you relate?

● What are some things you do on a typical day?

● What words might you use to describe yourself?

(Examples are “work as a credit union manager,” “hospice volunteer,” “kind,” “determined.”)

Pair off with someone else in the group that you know less well. Talk about your responses to the questions for about 10 minutes.

In the large group, introduce your new partner by telling the group something you learned about your partner that was not mentioned earlier.



Connecting With the r Faith

The First Commandment

You are to have no other gods.

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

We are to fear, love and trust God above all things.

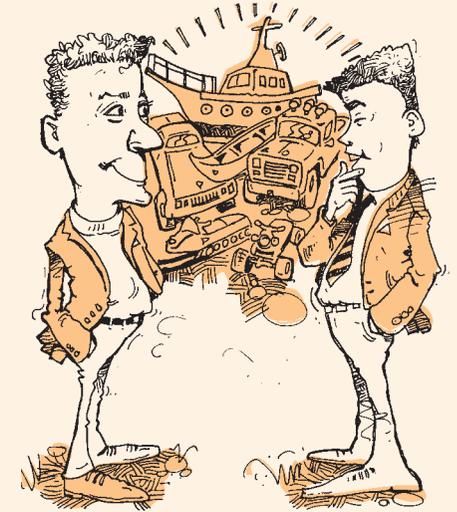
**Large Catechism
(Excerpt Summary)**

What is it to have a god? What is God? A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe God with our whole heart. The trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is really your God.

Many people think they have everything they need when they have money and property. In them they trust and boast stubbornly. Very few there are who are cheerful, who do not fret and complain. The desire for wealth clings to our nature all the way to the grave. So, too, those who boast of great learning, wisdom, power, prestige, family, and who honor and trust in them also have a god, but not the one, true God.

To have a God, you see, does not mean to lay hands upon God, or put God into a purse, or shut God up in a chest. We lay hold of God when our heart embraces and clings to God. True worship is that the heart should know no other consolation or confidence than in God.

Everyone has set up a god of one's own. Even in the mind of all the heathen, therefore, to have a



god means to trust and believe. Idolatry does not consist merely of erecting an image and praying to it. It is primarily in the heart which pursues other things and seeks help and consolation there.

An idolatry still prevalent in the world is the conscience which seeks help, comfort and salvation in its own works. It is unwilling to receive anything as a gift from God, just as if God were in our service.

Although much that is good comes to us from human beings, we receive it all from God. Creatures are only the hands, channels and means through which God bestows all blessings. Search and examine your own heart thoroughly and you will find whether or not it clings to God alone.

Many people think they have everything they need when they have money and property.

In order that this commandment not be taken lightly, God has attached to it, first, a terrible threat and, then, a beautiful, comforting promise:

Appendix to the First Commandment

For I am the Lord your God, mighty and jealous, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, and showing mercy to many thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

From the beginning God has completely rooted out all idolatry.

Even now there are proud, powerful and rich pot-bellies, who boast defiantly of their mammon and believe that they can withstand God's wrath. But they will not succeed. This is no laughing matter with God.

Terrible as these threats are, much mightier is the comfort in the promise that assures mercy to those who cling to God alone—sheer goodness and blessing. The trouble is that the world does not believe this at all. God will tolerate no presumption.

We had to explain the First Commandment at length since it is the most important; fulfillment of all the others will follow.

Reflection Questions

- 1 What do you think it means to have a god?
- 2 How would you describe what idolatry means?
- 3 How do you see idolatry in your worlds today? How do you experience idolatry in your own heart?
- 4 In what ways do you think God “roots out” idolatry in the world? What does this mean to you?

The Second Commandment **You are not to misuse the name of your God.**

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

We are to fear and love God, so that we do not curse, swear, practice magic, lie, or deceive using God's name, but instead use that very name in every time of need to call on, pray to, praise, and give thanks to God.

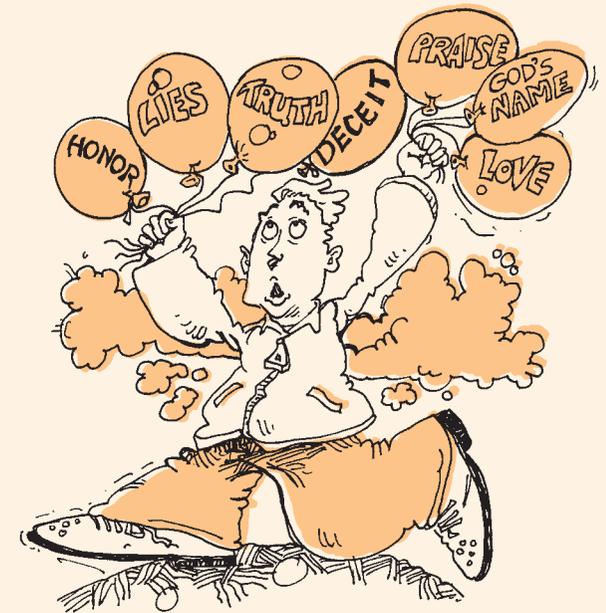
Large Catechism (Excerpt Summary)

As the First Commandment has inwardly instructed the heart and taught faith, so this commandment leads us outward and directs the lips and the tongue into the right relation to God. The first things that issue and emerge from the heart are words.

God's name cannot be more grievously abused than for purposes of falsehood and deceit. Everyone can readily infer when and in how many ways God's name is abused. To discuss it briefly, misuse of the divine name occurs most obviously in worldly business and in matters involving money, property and honor, whether publicly in court or in the market or elsewhere, when people perjure themselves, swearing by God's name or by their own soul.

The greatest abuse, however, occurs in spiritual matters, which pertain to the conscience, when false preachers arise and peddle their lying nonsense as the Word of God.

All this is an attempt to embellish yourself with God's name or to put up a good front and justify yourself, whether in ordinary worldly affairs or in sub-



The first things that issue and emerge from the heart are words.

lime and difficult matters of faith and doctrine.

To lie and deceive is in itself a gross sin, but it is greatly aggravated when we attempt to justify and confirm it by invoking God's name and using it as a cloak to cover our shame. So from a single lie a double one results — indeed manifold lies.

At the same time we are to use God's name properly, for it has been revealed and given to us precisely for our use and benefit. We are commanded to use it in the service of truth and when we teach, call on it in time of need or praise and thank God. This is a truly good work by which God is praised, truth and justice are established, falsehood is refuted, people are reconciled, obedience is rendered and quarrels are settled.

It helps to form the habit of commending ourselves each day

to God. Children also should be constantly urged to honor God's name. Then some good may take root, spring up and bear fruit. Those children who have been trained only with rods and blows will come to no good end; at best they will remain good only as long as the rod is on their backs. When we preach to children, we must also speak their language. Thus we have averted the misuse of the divine name and taught that its right use consists not only of words but also of practice and life.

Reflection Questions

1 How do you feel when you hear people misuse or abuse God's name? What do you think this says about their view of God?

2 How is false teaching a way of misusing God's name?

3 How does teaching children to respect God's name relate to discipline?

Connecting With r Daily Life

Activity One: Fear, Love and Trust

In the space given here, write responses to these questions:

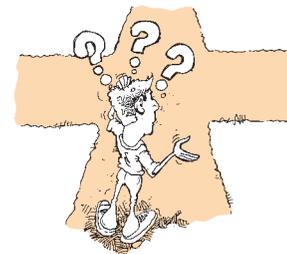
- In the middle of the night, as you lie restless and awake, who or what is it that you fear above all else?



- On the weekend, who or what do you love?

TGIF • TGIF • TGIF • TGIF • TGIF

- When you're faced with difficult decisions, who or what do you trust above all else?



In groups of two (or in the total group if your group numbers fewer than 10), share your responses to these questions. Talk about the questions in relation to the excerpts of the First Commandment: When does what we fear, love and trust above all things become a god? Why is that harmful?

Today's Slogans



Activity Two: Bumper Sticker Theology

Bumper stickers and advertisements convince us through an appeal to our basic beliefs. We are bombarded by these appeals every day.

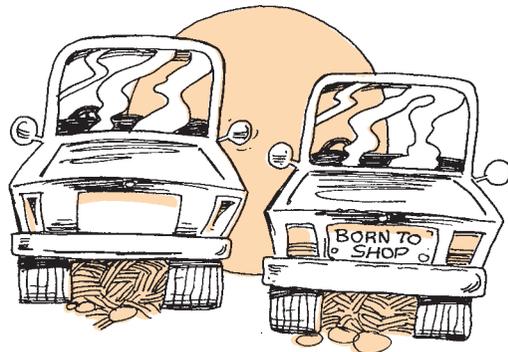
As a group, list as many advertising slogans as you can think of. Select one from the list. Put it at the top of one column. Erase the others.

Discuss the slogan selected, using these questions as a guide: What does this slogan really mean? To what is it appealing? Build on each other's answers until you have fully explored all the implications.

Next, at the top of a second column, write "Christian Faith." As a group, take each phrase you wrote in the first column and put a corresponding phrase in the second column that relates to Christian faith. Talk about your discoveries.

Connecting my faith with my daily life simply means that no matter where I am or what I do, I'm on assignment for God. I'm there for God. I'm God's hands. I'm God's feet. I'm God's ears. I listen with the ear of my heart to all that goes on. When God puts me in charge, God asks me to be there all ways and always.

— Pat Miles, a nurse



Growing Together

In Jesus Christ we connect more closely with each other. And as we connect with each other, we have the potential to connect in an even deeper way with our God. How would you like to grow together while you are apart from each other? How would you pray for one another?

During this time together, agree on one day in the coming week when you will focus on each other in prayer, perhaps at a specific time of day. Tell each other what might be occurring in your life at that moment or place.

Remember to include in your prayers the joys and sorrows, needs and gifts, and worries and hopes that you will give to God's caring hand.

Pray this prayer together:

God, you have called us to be your people that you might be our God. We bring you our questions, our experiences and our very selves. Help us fear, love and trust in you above anything else, so that together with you we might walk boldly in the world. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen

MONDAY	TUESDAY	W
	Pray for Sally today that she feels better about herself as a mom.	

Experiencing Until Next Time

Think about your daily life and reflect on the following:

- **In the worlds where you live, work and play, who asks for or demands your love, trust and devotion?**
My supervisor
- **What ideas, goals, activities and hobbies demand your trust and devotion?**
My company, my mom and dad and my kids

Make a list of these people and activities. Then ask yourself:

- **Is this request appropriate? In what ways is it appropriate? In what ways is it not appropriate?**
- **What do I fear, love and trust above all else in these situations? In what ways are these people, these ideas and these things really my gods? In what ways are they gifts of God? What do I believe?**

In the next week, as you move among your worlds, note the many messages coming at you from all directions. What are the varieties of gods vying for your allegiance?

Think about ways you will share with your congregation what you are doing in *Connections*.

As we connect with God in In

Connecting With Scriptures

Faith and life are joined in the witness of Scripture. Here God speaks to us about abundant living made possible by God's grace. Pray or read any of these biblical selections, and consider the questions, statements or directions associated with each passage. Use the space for notes that capture your thoughts.

Read John 1:1-34.

1 Who are you in relation to this God who became human to live among us?

2 Who is this God who was from the very beginning, and how can we know God?

in the beginning
was the
WORD

Read Romans 1.

1 How is faith in Jesus Christ central for Paul's life? For yours?

2 Notice words that describe how strongly Paul feels connected to the brothers and sisters in the faith to whom he is writing this letter. Whom do you "long to see" and "remember" in your prayers?

the power of
God for
salvation

Read Psalm 19.

1 Meditate on how the heavens are telling the glory of God.

2 How are the commandments of God "sure," "right," "clear" and "true"?

Let the words
of my mouth...

Using Other Resources

God — unchained, unpackaged, free; God faces people in the practical decisions of daily life.

From *The Hidden Discipline*,
by Martin Marty, page 3.

Session Two

How Do I Keep Going?

Holy Work and Sabbath Rest The Third Commandment

Going to the Heart of the Matter

In this session, we explore the Third Commandment: **You are to hallow the day of rest.**

The sense that life is speeding up is not just a vague suspicion. National surveys have indicated that leisure time for Americans has significantly decreased over the years. Eighty-plus hour work weeks are common. Even *Time* magazine, in an article entitled “How America Has Run Out of Time,” said sarcastically, “And the Sabbath is for what else: shopping.”

If our lives are completely hectic and anxious, we are neither testifying to Christ’s presence in our lives, nor are we in a position to minister to others. What does it mean both to honor our work and really to rest? What does it mean to have work to do in the world? How can we welcome the Sabbath, and what does it mean to keep it holy?

Talk about these questions with others in the *Connections* group:

- **As you were going about your daily life during the past week, what did you notice that people seemed to fear? What did you observe that people seemed to love or trust?**
- **How did your week go? What one experience, positive or negative, stands out?**
- **What slogans did you notice during the week? What did these sayings imply about values and gods?**

Take turns around the circle, with each person sharing one thing he or she noticed. Listen carefully to each person’s story.

Connecting With the Faith

The Third Commandment
You are to hallow the day of rest.

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

We are to fear and love God, so that we do not despise preaching or God’s Word, but instead keep that Word holy and gladly hear and learn it.

Large Catechism (Excerpt Summary)

“Sabbath” properly means to rest, that is, to cease from labor; hence our common expression for “stopping work” literally means “observing a holy day or holiday.” In the Old Testament God set apart the seventh day and appointed it for rest and commanded it to be kept holy above all other days, so that both human and beast might be refreshed and not be exhausted by constant labor.

The common people who have attended to their work and trades the whole week long should retire for a day to rest and be refreshed. Most especially we keep holy days so that people may have time and opportunity to participate in public worship, that is, that they may assemble to hear and discuss God’s Word and then praise God with song and prayer.

What is meant by “keeping it holy”? Nothing else than to devote it to holy words, holy works, holy life. In itself the day needs no sanctification, for it was created holy. But God wants it to be holy to you. How does this take place? Not when we sit behind the stove and refrain from external work, or dress up in our best clothes, but when we occupy

ourselves with God’s Word.

Indeed, we Christians should make every day a holy day; however, since all people do not have this much time and leisure, we must set apart a day for the whole community. Thus we may regulate our whole life and being according to God’s Word. Non-Christians can spend a day in rest and idleness, too, and so can the whole swarm of clerics. The Word of God is the true holy thing above all holy things.

Conversely, any conduct of work done apart from God’s Word is unholy in the sight of God, no matter how splendid and brilliant it may appear. Note the power and force of this commandment consist not of the resting but of the sanctifying. Place, time, persons and the entire outward order of worship are therefore instituted and appointed in order that God’s Word may exert its power publicly.

Therefore this commandment is violated not only by those who grossly misuse and desecrate the holy day, like those who in their greed or frivolity neglect to hear God’s Word or lie around in taverns dead drunk like swine, but also by that multitude of others

who listen to God's Word as they would to any other entertainment. We listen without serious concern.

Remember, then, that you must be concerned not only about hearing the Word but also about learning and retaining it. Those conceited people should be chastised who after hearing a sermon or two, become sick and tired of it and feel they know it all and need no more instruction. The devil bewitches and befuddles the hearts of many to take us

by surprise and stealthily take the Word of God away from us.

Therefore you must continually keep God's Word in your heart, on your lips and in your ears. When we seriously ponder the Word, hear it and put it to use, such is its power that it never departs without fruit. It always awakens new understanding, new pleasure and a new spirit of devotion, and it constantly cleanses the heart and its meditations. For the words are not idle or dead, but effective and living.

Reflection Questions

1 How would you define "holy day"?

2 How is Sabbath rest different from simply stopping work? In what ways do you observe a "holy day," that is, a day of rest from labor, each week?

3 In what ways does our public worship help us to focus on God's Word and keep us growing in holy words, holy works, holy life?

4 In what ways does your Sabbath rest refresh you for holy work?

Connecting With r Daily Life Days of the Week

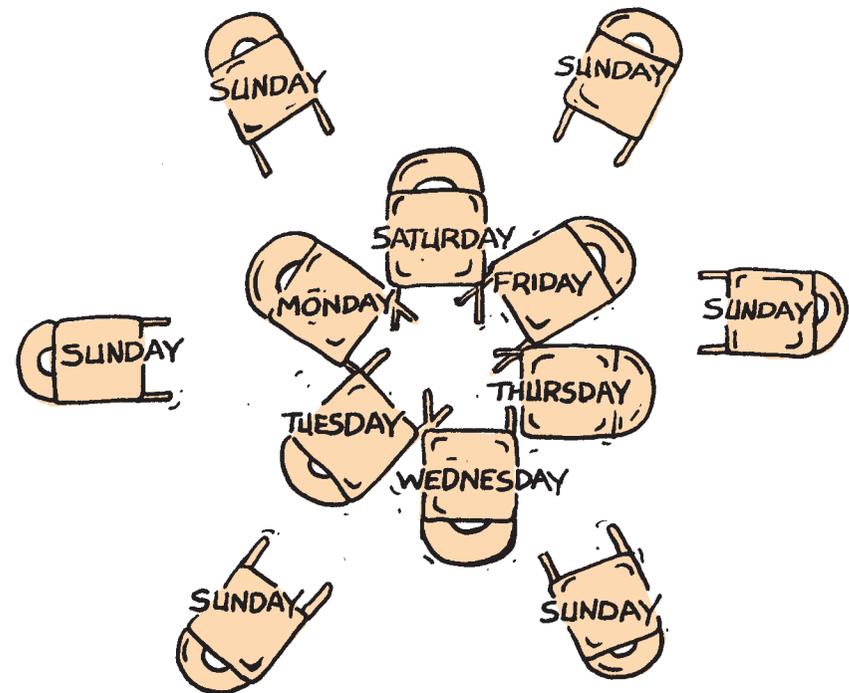
All of us have days when we wonder how we can keep going. We become overwhelmed by work. We worry about family, friends and financial difficulties. Maybe we are just plain bored. Yet usually we do keep going. Each of us has some built-in way of surviving.

We also have times during the day when we experience real excitement, joy and gratitude. Sometimes we take these times for granted. Sometimes we are afraid to enjoy them because something might go wrong or they might end too quickly.

Think back over the past week. Recall a day that was particularly notable, that is, a day in which everything seemed to go right or seemed to go wrong. This may be hard to do at first, at least without checking your schedule. Don't force yourself into instant recall. Give yourself a minute or two to remember a particular day.

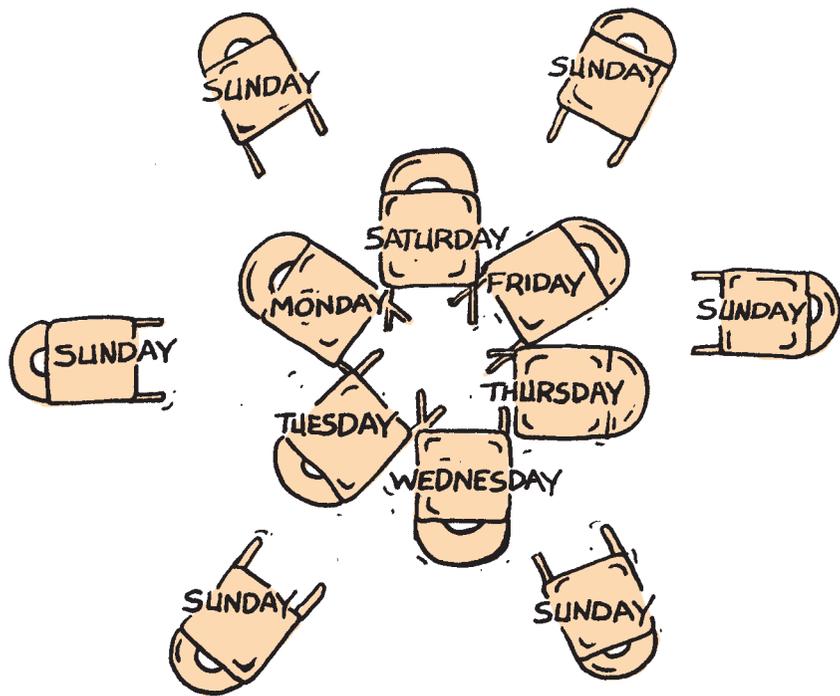
Representing the Days of the Week

Sometimes it's hard to translate Sunday "faith talk" to the language of our daily lives. This is an opportunity to listen carefully to one another and to speak about God's loving, empowering work in terms that make sense in relation to our daily experience.



- Take your place in one of the chairs inside or outside of the circle. Inside chairs represent a day of the week, except Sunday. Chairs outside this circle represent Sunday.

- Beginning with the Monday person, describe your day, from waking up in the morning to going to sleep at night.
- In turn, each weekday person tells about his or her day in detail, limiting storytelling to about five minutes.
- Those on the Sunday chairs listen to the weekday stories, asking the following questions: What am I hearing? What does faith have to offer or say to this person and this person's day?
- After the weekday stories are completed, reverse places. The Sunday people now take the inside-of-circle chairs and talk about what they have heard from the weekday people. Their specific question: What does faith have to say to the experiences of the weekday people?
- Gather in a single circle and talk about the experience. As you talk together, try to use the terms that the weekday people used.



Jesus did not say to the blind person, "You can walk," nor to the lame person, "You can see."
 — Letty Russell

Experiencing Until Next Time

Keeping a Log

Keep a simple log of the week. Finish these sentences:

- When I have had a particularly difficult day, I ...
- One person who gives me support during difficult times is ...
- When I wonder how I can keep going, I find it helpful to ...

Walk About – Talk About

Ask someone in your life about his or her work and how he or she deals with stress. Find out how this person uses "break" time. In what ways can small daily breaks be considered little Sabbaths? What would make it a time of holy rest?

Read Philippians 4:4-9.



Growing Together

With another person, share the following:

- How do you presently nurture your life spiritually?
- What is one way you could strengthen your life spiritually?
- How might we support each other in this growth?

Today's Journal
 On a difficult day:

A person who supports me:

How I keep going:

Connecting With Scriptures

Read or pray any of the portions of the Bible, and consider the statements or questions attached to the passage. Use the space for noting your thoughts.

Read John 1:35-51.

1 Recall some people in your own personal history who have invited you to “come and see Christ.”

2 Why does the text note, “It was about four o’clock in the afternoon”?
What does it mean to “remain with Jesus”?

What are you looking for?

Read Romans 2.

1 When we take comfort in our personal relationship with God at the expense of others, how does our judgment keep us from repentance?

2 How does the law show us our sin so that we can rest only in God’s grace?

God shows NO partiality...

Read Psalm 84.

1 What verses prepare you for going to worship with your congregation? In what way?

2 Find a quiet, holy place and rest. God dwells there. Find a bustling, holy place and rest. God dwells there.

How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord of hosts.

Using Other Resources

We usually see rest compulsively, as a desperate attempt to fill a vacuum that the absence of meaning and work leaves. Actually, we would understand this matter (rest) better if we could see it in reverse: rest as a cure for the work-sickness of our times.

From *The Hidden Discipline*, by Martin Marty, page 9.

Session Three

How Do I Live Faithfully with Others?

Relationships and Commitment The Fourth and Sixth Commandments

Going to the Heart of the Matter

In this session, we explore the Fourth and Sixth Commandments:

You are to honor your father and your mother.
You are not to commit adultery.

Those relationships that give us the most pleasure and pain are also the most personal. Spouse, children and parents: All are gifts. But it's not always easy to remember that. We continually struggle with questions of commitment. What does honor mean? What about authority, power, abuse and, most of all, love?

We carry many commitments: social, political, religious, familial and business. Each of these loyalties makes us who we are. The sorting out of our commitments — the strengthening of some, the changing of others — is what our lives are all about. Perhaps our most fundamental

commitment is the answer to the question: For what or whom am I going to live?

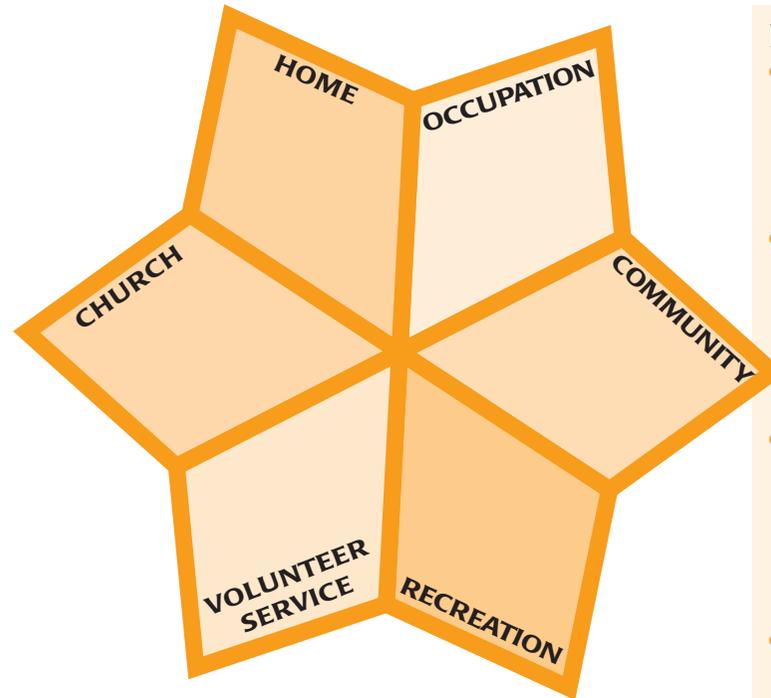
Although issues of relationships are personal, that doesn't mean they are private. Our individual lives affect our public lives together. How can we nurture healthy, committed relationships of mutual promise-keeping? How do we learn to forgive the sins of others?



Chart Your Relationships

On a large piece of paper, draw a figure like the one here. Label the sections HOME, CHURCH, COMMUNITY, OCCUPATION, RECREATION and VOLUNTEER SERVICE. Note the description of each of these “worlds” given in the Key.

In each section of the figure, write the names of people with whom you come into contact regularly in that world. Do this quickly, naming as many people as possible.



Key

- **Home:** People who regularly come into your home world, whether family, close neighbors or friends
- **Church:** People in your local faith community, as well as brothers and sisters in Christ around the world
- **Community:** People with whom you share citizenship: in your neighborhood, municipality, state, province, nation and globe
- **Occupation:** People with whom you relate in the activities of work (paid and non-paid), school, retirement, profession and household
- **Recreation:** People who are part of your world of leisure-time activities and social relationships
- **Volunteer service:** People in the places where you serve as a volunteer

With another person, talk about the following:

- **What are the specific ways you participate in each of these worlds?**
- **Select two worlds other than church. Name several people in each of these worlds. Tell about the relationship you have with each of these people.**
 - **What interactions or relationships do you have with these people? What interactions or relationships do they have with you?**
 - **What are specific ways your faith helps you relate to these people?**

Connecting With the Faith

The Fourth Commandment

You are to honor your father and your mother.

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

We are to fear and love God, so that we neither despise nor anger our parents and others in authority, but instead honor, serve, obey, love, and respect them.

The Large Catechism (Excerpt Summary)

To fatherhood and motherhood God has given the special distinction not simply to love our parents but also to honor them by our actions, serving them, helping them and caring for them when they are old, sick, feeble or poor.

Notice what a great, good and holy work is here assigned to children. For the love of God, let

Why, do you think, is the world now so full of unfaithfulness, shame, misery and murder? It is because everyone wishes to be his or her own master, be free from all authority, care nothing for anyone and do whatever she or he pleases.

us teach our young. If God's Word and will are placed first and observed, nothing ought to be considered more important than the will and word of our parents, provided that these, too, are subordinated to obedience toward God.

This is the way things go in the world. Both young and old are altogether wayward and unruly; they do nothing until they are driven with blows; and they defame and deprecate one

another behind their backs in any way they can. God, parents and teachers can never be sufficiently thanked.

God has attached to this commandment a promise to have long life in the land where you dwell. To have long life means not merely to grow old but to have all that pertains—health, family, livelihood, peace, good government, etc.

Out of the authority of parents all other authority is derived and developed. Through civil rulers as through our own parents, God gives us food, house and home, protection and security. Why, do you think, is the world now so full of unfaithfulness, shame, misery and murder? It is because everyone wishes to be his or her own master, be free from all authority, care nothing for anyone, and do whatever she or he pleases. Do your duty, then, and leave it to God how to support you and provide for your wants.

In addition, do not imagine that the parental office is a matter of your pleasure and whim. Everybody acts as if God gave us children for our pleasure and amusement. Let us bring up our children in the fear and knowl-



edge of God, and if they are gifted give them opportunity to learn

and study so that they may be of service wherever they are needed.

A great, good and holy work is here assigned to children.

Reflection Questions

1 In light of abusive parents and governments, how do we determine what it means to honor human authority?

2 What does “honor your father and mother” mean to you personally? What experience have you had with your own parents or children?

3 Skim through the excerpts again and ask yourself how you would respond to them as:

- A middle-aged person concerned about an elderly parent
- A parent concerned about a teenaged youth
- A child in a blended family

The Sixth Commandment

You are not to commit adultery.

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

We are to fear and love God, so that we lead pure and decent lives in word and deed, and each of us loves and honors his or her spouse.

Large Catechism (Excerpt Summary)

Inasmuch as there is a shameful mess and cesspool of all kinds of vice and lewdness among us, this commandment applies to every form of unchastity, however it is called. Not only is the external act forbidden, but also every kind of cause, motive and means. In short, everyone is required both to live chastely and to help the neighbor do the same. Whenever you fail to do this, or wink at it as if it were no concern of yours, you are just as guilty as the culprit. Thus God by this commandment wants every husband or wife guarded and protected from any trespass.

Married life is no matter for jest or idle curiosity but an object of God's serious concern. It is of the highest importance to God that persons serve the world, pro-

mote knowledge of God, godly living and all virtues, and fight against wickedness and the devil.

We should not despise or disdain marriage. It is not an exceptional estate, but the most universal. It is not only honorable, but necessary.

No one has so little love and inclination for chastity as those who under the guise of great sanctity avoid marriage and indulge in open and shameless fornication.

For marital chastity it is above all things essential that husband and wife live together in love and harmony, cherishing each other wholeheartedly and with perfect fidelity. This is why St. Paul so urgently admonishes husbands and wives to love and honor each other.

Reflection Questions

1 In what ways is keeping this commandment guarding against harming your neighbor? How is your spouse also your neighbor?

2 What are some of the many ways we can engage in lewd behavior today?

3 What does it mean to pursue a chaste and faithful life, whether married or single?

Connecting With r Daily Life

Stations and Vocations

In each of the worlds in which we live (home, occupation, leisure, volunteer and so forth), we fulfill certain roles and live in particular relationships. These roles and relationships are our stations in life.

Every human being fulfills a number of different roles in his or her life. That is, each person has various stations. Luther considered one station no better or no more holy than another.

Look again at the figure you drew on page 27. Think about the roles and relationships (the stations) you have in each of the worlds listed.

- Along the left side of a sheet of paper, quickly list all of the stations (roles) you fill.
Share your list with another person. Talk about one particular role, telling each other some of the challenges, implications, dilemmas, joys and responsibilities of that role, and ways in which it has changed or is changing.

Along with the stations we fill in our worlds, we also have a vocation, or calling. A vocation is the calling we receive to live out the gospel in our daily life. It is the way we live out our relationships with others in our stations. Our vocation gives us a sense of purpose. It is rooted in our freedom in Christ.

- On the right-hand side of the paper, make a list of your vocations for each of the stations listed. (For example, in the station of parent, you may have the vocation of nurturer or caregiver. As boss, you may have the vocation of fairness.)
Again with your partner, share what you wrote. Help each other recognize your vocation in your stations and your calling in each of your roles and relationships.

Hand-drawn graphic with two columns: STATIONS (Farmer, Mother, Wife, Red Cross volunteer, Neighbor, Citizen of Wayne County, Citizen of the world, Daughter, Sister, Friend) and VOCATIONS (Steward of the land, Food-provider, Care-giver, nurturer, Partner, Lover, Life-preserver, Communicator in crisis, Organizer, Advocate, voter, Researcher, Memory keeper, Listener, Prophet, financial advisor, Connector, Listener).

As human beings, we make and break promises, and are disappointed in others for not keeping commitments to our expectations. In Christ, however, we are forgiven for breaking promises and freed to accept our vocation (our calling) to love with God's kind of love. We will not love completely or perfectly, but we no longer need to make a god of someone else or be a god to them. We are free to receive our relationships, not as a claim on us, but as a gift. This allows us to serve them as Christ would.

With your *Connections* partner, consider these questions:

- **What is God calling us to do in this role and relationship? What is our vocation in this station?**
- **How does being forgiven in Christ free us for a new relationship even within an old role?**
- **How are your stations and vocations changing?**

"Judy's" partner, in helping her recognize her calling at this time in her life, asked some challenging questions:

You're worried about the problems facing farmers this summer because of all the flooding. How can you fulfill your station as neighbor? What might be your calling as a citizen in this situation?"

I know you have many friends. It seems sometimes, though, that you try too hard to meet all their wants and needs, and this wears you out. What roles could you let go?"



Preparing for a Visit

In the next session, you and the other members of the *Connections* group will go on a field trip — a visit — to a world of one of the *Connections* leaders. This will give you an opportunity to experience a place where this person spends a good portion of her or his time.

The purpose of the visit is to experience a world outside the church building. Although you have many opportunities to visit other worlds, rarely is there a chance to see a world of another church member through that person's eyes of faith. This will be a special and unique opportunity.

With the other *Connections* participants, plan the visit for next time.

Experiencing Until Next Time

Walk About — Look About

During the coming week, choose a particular place — a shopping mall, a street you walk each day or the area where you live — and really look and observe people and relationships. Ask yourself:

- **What is each person doing?**
- **What relationships do I see among people?**
- **What commitments do I observe?**
- **In what ways may God be working in each situation?**

Writing (Righting) a Relationship

Call, write or use the internet to contact a special person in your life with whom you have not spoken or corresponded for some time. This could be a parent, child, friend, sibling or mentor.

Watching a Film

Select a film or television program to watch together as a group. As you watch, ask yourself the following questions:

- **What is the premise here about commitment in relationships?**
- **What are the dilemmas?**
- **Where is the power for change and the signs of hope?**
- **How does the gospel speak to these dilemmas?**

Growing Together

Sing or say together the hymn, "Take My Life, That I May Be" (ELW 583, 685).

Take turns around the group to complete this sentence: "God is calling me to ..." Then pray together using the prayer sentence starter: "O God, help me ..."

Connecting With Scriptures

Read these selections from Scripture. Afterwards, consider the questions as a way of connecting your life with God's Word.

Read John 2.

1 What is the relationship between signs and belief? In what ways do you trust God to know even your unbelief?

2 What does this first of Jesus' signs at the wedding feast say to you about Christ and relationships?

and his disciples
believed
in him

Using Other Resources

In the time of the Reformation, marriage was downgraded by a church which elevated celibacy and virginity to the highest status. Today, marriage is upstaged by a world which elevates license, lack of concern for the other and lovelessness in the name of romantic love.

From *The Hidden Discipline*, by Martin Marty, p. 24.

Read Romans 3.

1 If no one except God is righteous (perfect, holy, just), then why should we worry about the law? If justice and forgiveness is God's business, then why don't we just "live it up"?

2 If falsehood and unfaithfulness permeate all human relationships, how is the truthfulness and faithfulness of God a strength for new life together?

they are now
justified
by God's
grace
as a gift

Read Psalm 88.

1 Allow God to know the depths of your pain. When do you feel God is absent? Cry to God and let God cry with you.

2 What joyful relationships do you celebrate? What sorrows, regrets or anger do you hold?

let my
prayer
come
before
you

Session Four

How Do I Live in Dangerous Times?

Death and Life The Fifth and Seventh Commandments

Going to the Heart of the Matter

In this session, we explore the Fifth and Seventh Commandments:

You are not to kill.
You are not to steal.

We live in dangerous times. We fear the stranger. Sometimes we fear our neighbor. Perhaps our neighbor is afraid of us. Hardly a day goes by that we don't see violence portrayed in the news. Is there no safe place to which we can escape? How can we deal with random acts of violence? We have lived with danger throughout history. Will it ever end?

And what about theft? The ways in which people can rob and defraud one another continue to grow. Stealing seems to be a way to get along in today's world for more and more people.

So the world becomes divided. We've got the "good guys" and the "bad guys."

Or is it that simple? Sometimes we are so angry we may feel as if we could do bodily harm to someone. And what about our business transactions? Do we rob people when we take advantage of them? After all, competition runs the world, doesn't it?

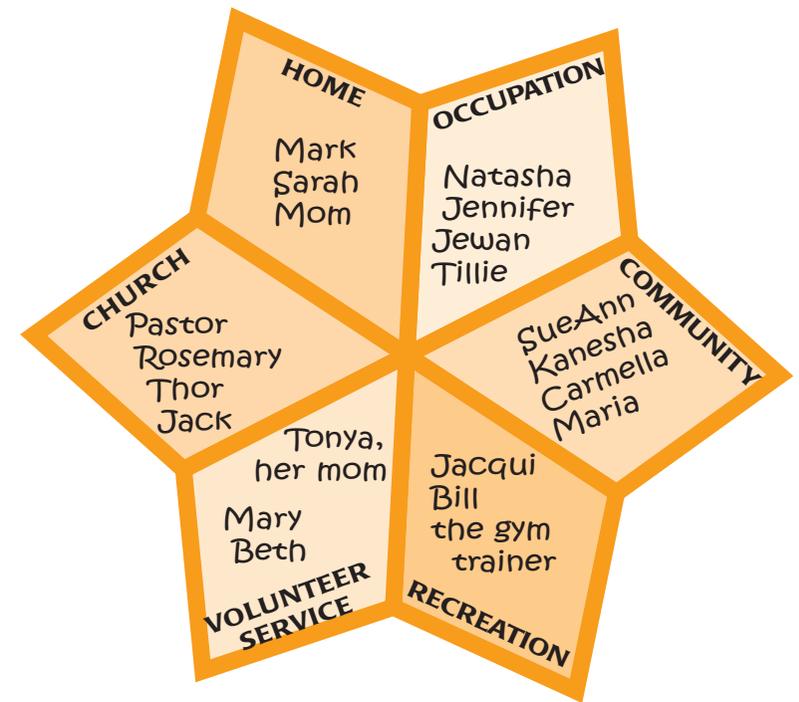
In these commandments, God's people face the realities of evil and death. More importantly, here God shows the way of life that flows from God's own kindness and love.



Beginning Where We Are

Look at the figure you drew in the last session. Think about each of the worlds and people listed. Then jot down some notes in response to these questions:

- How have your worlds changed or fluctuated this past week?
- Where did you spend most of your time? What relationships were present?
- How have your callings changed in any of those worlds?



Think of a particular place where you were this week. Perhaps it is the place you chose at the end of the last session where you planned to observe people and relationships closely. Recall everything you can about that place.

What did you experience or hear about in that world that might have caused you to be afraid or angry? What evidence of danger did you see in that place?

The Fifth Commandment
You are not to kill.

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

We are to fear and love God, so that we neither endanger nor harm the lives of our neighbors, but instead help and support them in all of life's needs.

**Large Catechism
(Excerpt Summary)**

This commandment is simple enough. We must not kill, either by hand, heart or word.

As God well knows, the world is evil and this life is full of misery. This and other commandments are a boundary between good and evil. We must live among many people who do us harm, and so we have reason to be at enmity with them. You acquire many enemies who begrudge you even the least good, whether physical or spiritual. When we see such people, our hearts rage and we are ready to shed blood and

take revenge. Then follow cursing and blows, and eventually calamity and murder. God wishes to have all people defended, delivered and protected from the wickedness and violence of others, and has set up this commandment as a wall, fortress and refuge around our neighbor so that no one may do bodily harm or injury.

No one should harm another for any evil deed, no matter how much the person deserves it. Not only is murder forbidden, but also everything that may lead to murder. The spirit of revenge

clings to every one of us. God wishes to remove the root and source of this bitterness toward our neighbor. We should not harm anyone, first by hand or deed, next by our tongue, and finally our heart should harbor no hostility.

This commandment is violated also when we fail to do good to our neighbors or fail to prevent, protect and save them from suffering bodily harm or injury. If you send a person away naked when you could clothe him, you have let him freeze to death. If you see anyone suffer hunger and do not feed her, you have let her starve (Matt. 25:43).

Therefore it is God's real intention that we should allow no one to suffer harm but show to everyone all kindness and love. If this could be thoroughly impressed on people's minds, we would have our hands full of good works to do.

If you send a person away naked when you could clothe him, you have let him freeze to death.

No one should harm another for any evil deed, no matter how much the person deserves it.

Reflection Questions

1 Luther knows the human heart. In the worlds in which you live, where have you experienced the motives and actions he describes?

2 How do you deal with your own sense of hostility and revenge?

3 How do you think this might apply not only to individuals but also to institutions such as corporations, governments and churches?

The Seventh Commandment
You are not to steal.

The Small Catechism

What does this mean?

We are to fear and love God, so that we neither take our neighbors' money or property nor acquire them by using shoddy merchandise or crooked deals, but instead help them to improve and protect their property and income.

**The Large Catechism
(Excerpt Summary)**

Next to our own person and spouse, our temporal property is dearest to us.

This, too, God wants to have protected. To steal is nothing else than to acquire another's property by unjust means. This includes taking advantage of our neighbor. Stealing is a widespread, common vice, but people pay so little attention to it that the matter is entirely out of hand. If all who are thieves, though they are unwilling to admit it, were

hanged on the gallows, the world would soon be empty, and there would be a shortage of both hangmen and gallows.

Thievery is the most common craft and the largest guild on earth. If we look at humankind in all its conditions, it is nothing but a vast, wide stable full of great thieves. These people are called gentleman swindlers or big operators.

Far from being picklocks and sneak-thieves who loot a cash box, they sit in office chairs and are called great lords and honor-

able, good citizens, and yet with a great show of legality they rob and steal.

This, in short, is the way of the world. Those who can steal and rob openly are safe and free, unmolested by anyone, even claiming honor. Meanwhile the little sneak thieves who have committed one offense must bear disgrace and punishment so as to make the others look respectable and honorable.

Daily the poor are defrauded. New burdens and high prices are imposed. All misuse the market in their own willful, conceited, arrogant way. We shall stand by and let such persons fleece, grab and hoard; anyone who robs and takes things by violence and dishonesty must put up with another who plays the same game. For God is a master of this art; since everyone robs and steals from the

other, God punishes one thief by means of another.

Beware how you deal with the poor of whom there are many now. If, when you meet the poor who must live from hand to mouth, you arrogantly turn them away whom you ought to give aid, they will go away wretched and dejected, and because they can complain to no one else, they will cry to heaven. Such people's cries will be no joking matter.

Stealing is not to be confined to narrow limits but must extend to all our relations with our neighbors. We are forbidden to do our neighbor any injury or wrong in any way imaginable and we are commanded to promote and further our neighbor's interests, and when they suffer want we are to help, share and lend to both friends and foes.

Reflection Questions

1 Although these words were written 500 years ago, Luther seems to speak directly to our situation today. What similarities to our world do you see? What experiences have you had that support this?

2 In what ways do people "steal" from their neighbors other than by direct theft? What words could you use to describe acts that are a form of stealing?

3 What are some issues of justice today with regard to the unequal distribution of wealth locally and globally?

Connecting With r Daily Life

Making a Visit

During this session you and the other *Connections* participants will visit a world of one of the leaders. This might be the person's place of work or volunteer activity, the leader's home and family or a place where the leader goes for recreation.

The purpose of the visit is to help you and other *Connections* participants get acquainted with a particular world of the leader and, thereby, get to know the leader better. It is also important that you see God at work in the particular world of the leader and, thereby, recognize how God is present creating and redeeming this particular world.

In the midst of God's world, God's people are at work, creatively sustaining this interdependent world. At the same time we are hurting the world and blaming each other as well as God. We don't fear, trust and love God as we should, and so we rob and harm our neighbors in blatant and subtle ways.

The visits in this and other sessions will provide you and other *Connections* participants an opportunity to witness God and God's people at work in a particular place. The visits will also allow you to recognize ways in which God's commandments are broken.



God makes the commerce, the trucks and the highways. God supplies the energy by which the world stays alive. God is present here.

Making a Visit

1 As you tour the place where your host has invited you, ask:

- What are some of the problems in this world?

- What are some of the satisfactions?

2 Listen carefully as your host describes the world and what happens there. Reflect on these questions:

- What are some roles (stations) that the host fills here?
- What do you see as the host's calling?
- Thinking in Luther's terms, what killing or stealing is going on?
- What works of compassion and justice take place here?



3 Make the faith connections. Reflect on these questions:

- What is God doing here?
- What is the Creator doing? That is, what new things are being created, and what is being maintained?
- What is the Redeemer doing here? What would be different here if Christ had not been crucified and resurrected?
- What is the Spirit doing here? What was said, heard and felt in this visit to help you understand God better?

Growing Together

Read Psalm 19 or another psalm.

Pray this prayer

together: O God, who was

before the worlds began, we welcome your presence in our worlds.

Bless this world we have visited and bless these people. Bless the

many areas of our daily lives. Root out

from among us the ways we harm creation and each other. Fill us with a love of justice.

In the name of Christ who redeems all. Amen

Experiencing Until Next Time

Revisiting Your Worlds

A visit to one world helps us look at all areas of our daily lives differently. Think about one of your own worlds. Jot down responses to the questions used during the visit in terms of your own world.

Reading Beyond the Headlines

Consider one news story involving theft, murder or violence. Ask the following questions:

- Why was the headline worded the way it was?
- In what ways did the headline reflect the real issue?
- In what ways did it make a sensational appeal?
- What is "sin" in this story?
- What are the justice issues in this story?
- Who has been harmed and in what way?

Follow up on this one story and see where it leads you.

Connecting With Scriptures

Read or pray these Bible segments as a way to stay connected to what you have experienced this session. Consider the questions in your moments of private devotion or with other believers.

Read John 3.

1 What does it mean to you to be born again in baptism?

2 How does the gift of eternal life change the way you think about the value of human life?

For God
SO loved
the
world...

Read Romans 4.

1 Why is it so important that we understand that no one, not even Abraham, is justified (made right with God) through works?

2 The world has a rating system for sin: If we don't steal or kill, we reckon we are okay. What is the deeper truth here?

If
Abraham
was
justified
by
works...

Your word is... a light for my path.

Read Psalm 119.

1 How are God's commandments a guide for you and for your life?

2 We live by grace, not by keeping the commandments. Where do you find God's grace in this psalm about loving the law of the Lord?

Using Other Resources

If one is conservative about economics, one shouts "welfare state" at all who would see to it that the poor are well-regarded. If one is "a liberal," one will shout "exploitation" at all who want to build personal incentives into the economy ... All can find excuse: the structures seem too big for the individual to have an impact on them.

From *The Hidden Discipline*, by Martin Marty, page 26.

Session Five

What's the Truth About Lying?

Disgrace and Grace The Eighth Commandment

Going to the Heart of the Matter

In this session, we explore the Eighth Commandment:

You are not to bear false witness against your neighbor.

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” But words do hurt. We’ve been hurt by the words of others. Others have been hurt by our words.

God’s unconditional love — grace — covers our disgrace. God does not betray or abandon us. God is faithful to God’s covenant. God forgives us when we slip and use words that hurt. God also supports us as, free in Christ, we proclaim God’s unconditional love.



Beginning Where We Are

Recall the visit that took place during the last session. With two or three other *Connections* participants, discuss these questions:

- What was the highlight of the visit for you? What do you remember best?
- What new reflections and insights do you have about the host and the place visited?
- In light of the visit, in what ways do you see your own world differently?
- How do you see faith in a new way?

The Eighth Commandment
**You are not to bear false witness
against your neighbor.**

The Small Catechism

What does this mean?

We are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.

**The Large Catechism
(Excerpt Summary)**

Besides our own body, our wife or husband, and our temporal property, we have one more treasure which is indispensable to us, namely, our honor and good name, for it is intolerable to live among people in public disgrace and contempt. God would have all people maintain their self-respect.

This pertains to public courts of justice. A poor person is inevitably oppressed, loses the case and suffers punishment. It is the universal misfortune of the world that persons of integrity seldom preside in courts of justice. A judge ought, above all, to be someone of integrity, and not only upright but also wise, sagacious, brave and fearless.

The first application of this commandment, then, is that everyone should help the neighbor maintain his or her rights. The goal is perfect justice and equity.

Next, it extends to spiritual jurisdiction or administration. Wherever there are godly preachers and Christians, they must endure having the world call them heretics. The Word of God

must undergo the most shameful and spiteful persecution; it is contradicted, perverted, misused and misinterpreted.

The third aspect concerns us all. It forbids all sins of the tongue by which we may injure or offend our neighbor. It is a common vice of human nature that everyone would rather hear evil than good. We cannot tolerate having evil spoken of us; we want the golden compliments of the whole world. Yet we cannot bear to hear the best spoken of others.

I may see and hear that my neighbor sins, but to make my neighbor the talk of the town is not my business. Learning a bit of gossip about someone else, we spread it into every corner, relishing and delighting in it like pigs that roll in the mud and root around in it with their snouts. This is nothing else than usurping the judgment and office of God. For though you do not wield the sword, you use your venomous tongue to the disgrace and harm of your neighbor.

Therefore God forbids you to speak evil about another even though, to your certain knowl-

edge, they are guilty. But you say: "Why shouldn't I speak if it is the truth?" I reply: "Why don't you bring it before the regular judge?" "Oh, I cannot prove it publicly; I might be called a liar and sent away in disgrace."

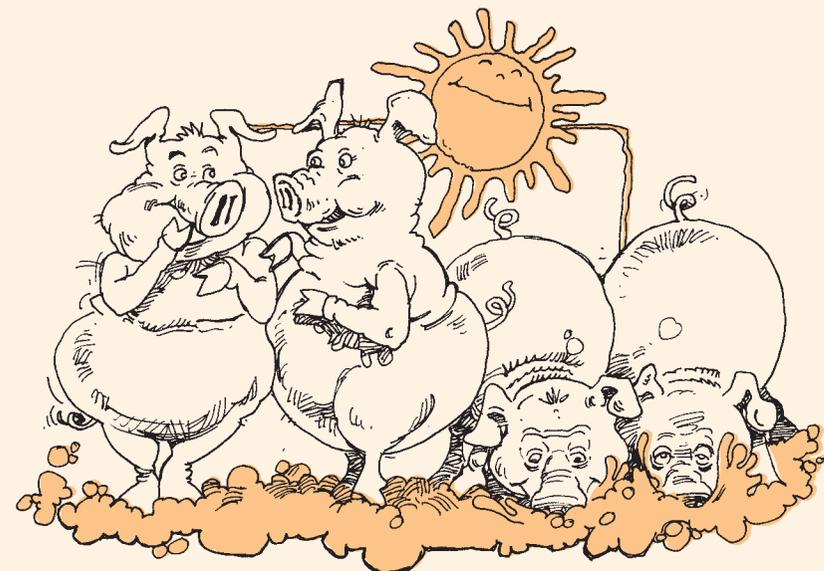
Ah, now do you smell the roast? If you do not trust yourself to make your charges before the proper authorities, then hold your tongue. Honor and good name are easily taken away, but not easily restored.

Necessity requires one to report evil, to prefer charges to attest, examine and witness. The right way to deal with it is in Matthew 18:15. Admonish your neighbor privately that your neighbor may amend. If your neighbor does not listen, take one or two others with you that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. So the individual is to be dealt

with personally and not gossiped about. If this does not help, then bring the matter before the public. Where sin is public, the punishment ought to be public, so that everyone may know how to guard against it.

A person should use his or her tongue to speak only good of everyone, to cover the neighbor's sins and infirmities, to overlook them, and to cloak and veil them with his or her own honor. We should prevent everything that tends to disgrace. There is nothing that can do greater good or greater harm, in spiritual or in temporal matters, than this smallest and weakest of members, the tongue.

The first application of this commandment, then, is that everyone should help the neighbor maintain his or her rights.



**LEARNING A BIT OF GOSSIP ABOUT SOMEONE ELSE,
WE SPREAD IT INTO EVERY CORNER.**

Reflection Questions

1 When and how have you experienced both the great good and the great harm which the tongue can do so easily?

2 What words have hurt you this past week? What words have you used that may have hurt someone else in your world?

3 What are some ways you can avoid using harsh words?

4 How can you respond to hurtful words?

5 How can you find success in all of your worlds without using harsh language?

A person should use his or her tongue to speak only good of everyone, to cover the neighbor's sins and infirmities, to overlook them and to cloak and veil them with his or her own honor.

Connecting With r Daily Life

Making a Visit

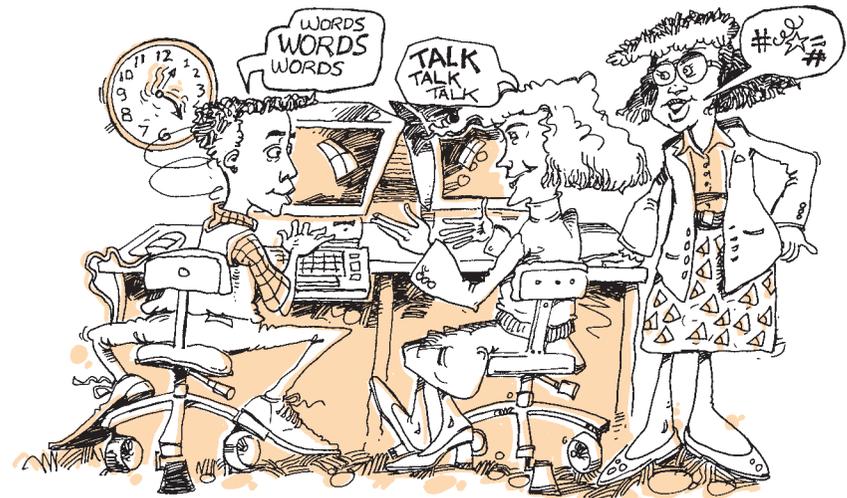
1 Think about these questions as your host briefs you about the second visit:

- What is going on in this world?
- How do the people here relate with one another?
- In what ways does what is done here affect people outside this place?
- How is God at work here?

2 Almost anywhere we go, we hear people using hostile words or maligning others. In the workplace and elsewhere, we may observe people disparaging and telling tales about others in order to move ahead. Despite our efforts to avoid bearing false witness, our human propensity to put each other down sometimes makes that difficult.

As you tour the place, pay special attention to the language that surrounds you. Consider these questions:

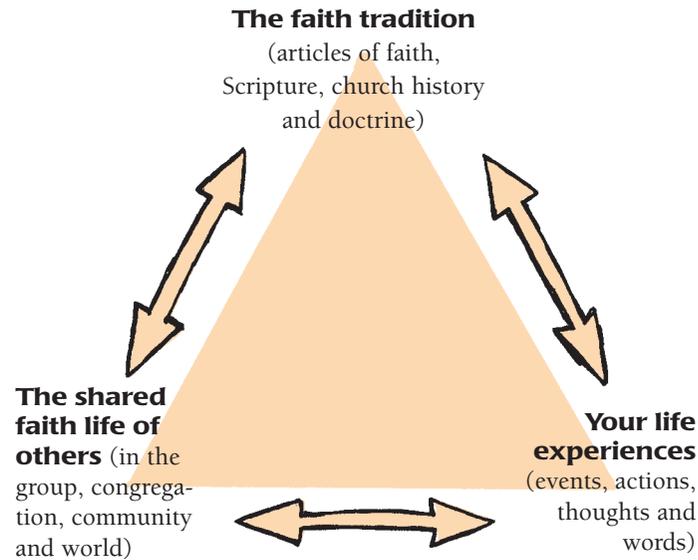
- What do I hear people talking about here?
- What tone of voice do people use with each other?
- How do people seem to relate to each other here?
- What “false witness” might one be tempted to bear in this place?



Looking at a Diagram

Three components are part of *Connections*: the life experiences of each person in the group, the faith tradition (Scripture, Luther's catechisms, church doctrine and so forth) and the faith life shared by participants and others in the congregation, community and world.

- In what ways have you noted these three components as you have been part of the *Connections* group?
- Why do you think each arrow points in both directions?



Taking Time by Yourself

In the space provided on the next page, write down the most significant put-down (disgrace) you've experienced.

- Why did it hurt so much? What, at the core, was the issue?
- How have you experienced God's grace (God's word of covenant faithfulness) in this situation? In what ways do you continue to struggle with this?

If possible, share this with another *Connections* participant. Speak a word of grace to each other.

Growing Together

Say this prayer together:

O Name that is higher than every name, we thank you that we have been called by the name of Christ. Preserve us from gossip, dishonesty and slander. Give us honesty, forthrightness, compassion and integrity to uphold the name and reputation of every brother and sister in the faith and on this earth. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen

Experiencing Until Next Time

Use the questions from *Taking Time by Yourself* and the reflection questions following *The Large Catechism* excerpts to observe your worlds this week.

Be aware of how words are used to build up or tear down others. Reflect more deeply about the consequences.

What role did you play in any of these situations?



My most significant (or embarrassing or hurting) put-down:

Each of these Bible readings deals with a basic life question you may have faced. As you read and pray these sections of the Scriptures, think how you have named and encountered these basic questions in your own life.

Read John 4.

1 What did the disciples think of this woman? How might this woman be described today?

2 What implications does this story have for our lives today, especially in relating to our neighbors near and far?

Jesus talking
with a
Samaritan
woman...
scandalous

Read Romans 5.

1 Read the words and phrases of this chapter slowly. Read them aloud! What does each word and phrase mean for your daily life?

2 What words have you heard in your worlds this week that wound and kill?

since we are
justified
by faith,
we have
peace
with God

Read Psalm 8.

1 How does all of creation proclaim God's name?

2 Consider 10 human beings, of all kinds, and remember that God created each one. Name them in your prayers now and during the week.

Using Other Resources

How is it possible that you are not called? You have always been in some state or station; you have always been a husband or wife, or boy or girl or servant. Picture before you the humblest state. Are you a husband, and you think you have not enough to do? ... Again: Are you a son or daughter, and do you think you have not enough work with yourself, to continue chaste, pure and temperate during your youth, obey your parents, and offend no one by word or deed? ... Again: Are you a prince, a lord, spiritual or secular; who has more to do than you, in order that your subjects may do right, preserve peace and wrong is done by no one? ... See, as now no one is without some commission and calling, so no one is without some kind of work, if he or she desires to do what is right. All, therefore, are to take heed to continue in their callings, look to themselves, faithfully do what is commanded, and serve God and keep God's commandments; then we will have so much to do that all time will be too short, all places too cramped, all resources of help too weak.

From "Luther's Church Postil," *The Precious and Sacred Writings of Martin Luther*, John Nicholas Lenker, ed. and trans., pages 242-43.

Session Six

Do I Want Too Much?

Greed and Justice The Ninth and Tenth Commandments

In this session, we explore the Ninth and Tenth Commandments:

You are not to covet your neighbor's house.

You are not to covet your neighbor's wife, male or female servant, cattle, or whatever is his.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

In Dante's description of hell in *The Divine Comedy*, he often portrayed the inhabitants of hell as eternally cursed to exist in a state that monstrously fulfilled the desires they craved while on earth. Dante portrayed the greedy as gluttons. On Earth they made no better use of the gifts of God than to wallow in food and drink; they produced nothing but garbage and offal. Here in hell they lie through all eternity, themselves the garbage, half-buried in fetid stench, while Cerberus, the ravenous three-headed dog of hell, stands guard over them, ripping and tearing them with his claws and teeth.

We live in our consumer-based society. Our culture beguiles us toward greed with slogans such as "Shop 'til you drop!" If this saying is true, what might Dante use as the image of eternal punishment that would go with this saying? What other examples can you think of that are contemporary versions of hell?

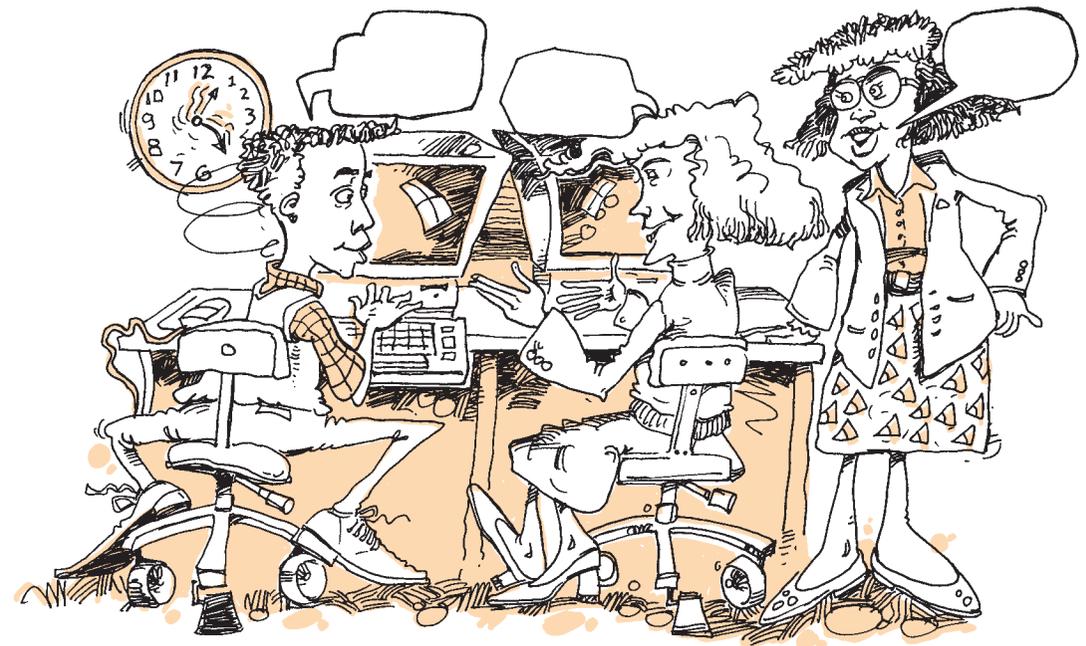
God is a bountiful God. We give thanks to God for the bounty with which God has blessed us. At the same time, we are called to live with simplicity, responsibility and justice. We care about justice — to a degree. But we may not want to think about the inequities in the distribution of the world's resources.

Coveting seems like a less serious problem than, say, killing. But its subtlety may be its power. We massage our self-esteem by securing more things, more friends and more power. Why do we seem to want what another has? Why do we seek to raise our self-esteem by wanting and getting?

Beginning Where We Are

You and the other *Connections* participants have visited the worlds of two members of the *Connections* group. After two visits:

- What new insights do you have about using visits to learn about the worlds of others? About God's activity in the world?
- What did you observe that was "grace-full" in these visits?
- Where did you see signs of the human propensity to build up oneself at the expense of others?



The Ninth Commandment
You are not to covet your neighbor's house.

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

We are to fear and love God, so that we do not try to trick our neighbors out of their inheritance or property or try to get it for ourselves by claiming to have a legal right to it and the like, but instead be of help and service to them in keeping what is theirs.

The Tenth Commandment

You are not to covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, of anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

We are to fear and love God, so that we do not entice, force, or steal away from our neighbors their spouses, household workers, or livestock, but instead urge them to stay and fulfill their responsibilities to our neighbors.

**Large Catechism
(Excerpt Summary)**

The Seventh Commandment prohibits seizing or withholding another's possessions to which you have no right. But here it is also forbidden to entice anything away from your neighbor, even though in the eyes of the world you could do it honorably, without accusation or blame for fraudulent dealing.

Such is nature that we all begrudge another's having as much as we have. Everyone acquires all one can and lets others look out for themselves. We think up artful dodges and sly tricks (better and better ones are being devised daily) under the guise of justice. We brazenly dare

to boast of it and insist that it should be called not rascality but shrewdness and business acumen.

The situation occurs most frequently in lawsuits in which someone sets out to gain and squeeze something out of one's neighbor. For example, when people wrangle and wrestle over a large inheritance, real estate, etc., they resort to whatever arguments have the least semblance of right, so varnishing and garnishing them that the law supports them. Similarly if people covet a castle, city, country or other great estate, they practice bribery, through friendly connections and by any other means at their disposal.

The same thing happens in

ordinary business affairs, where one cunningly slips something out of another's hand so that the victim is helpless to prevent it. We hurry and worry people, and yet this must not be considered illegal but honest. Hence the sayings, "First come, first served," and "Everyone must look out for oneself." Who is ingenious enough to imagine how much one can acquire by such specious pretexts? The world does not consider this wrong, and it does not see that the neighbor is being taken advantage of and forced to sacrifice what he or she cannot spare.

You must learn that God does not wish you to deprive your neighbors of anything that is theirs, letting them suffer loss while you gratify your greed. It is all done "under the hat" so as to escape detection. It may not be called stealing or fraud, yet it is coveting — that is, having designs upon your neighbor's property, luring it away from

them against their will, and begrudging what God gave them. The judge and the public may have to leave you in possession of it, but God will not, for God sees your wicked heart and the deceitfulness of the world. If you give the world an inch, it will take a yard, and at length open injustice and violence follow.

Thus these commandments are directed especially against envy and miserable covetousness. God's purpose is to destroy all the roots and causes of our injuries to our neighbors.

Everyone acquires all one can and lets others look out for themselves. We think up artful dodges and sly tricks (better and better ones are being devised daily) under the guise of justice. We brazenly dare to boast of it and insist that it should be called not rascality but shrewdness and business acumen.

Reflection Questions

1 How do we "varnish and garnish" the law to satisfy our own greed? What have you coveted this past week?

2 In our competitive, first-place-is-best society, how do we "hurry and worry" our neighbors to secure our own gain?

3 At the time of Moses, wives and servants were considered property along with the ox and donkey. How are some people still considered "possessions" today?

Luther's Doctrine of Two Kingdoms

Luther helps us distinguish the life of faith from the “way the world runs” with his doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. Although this doctrine has sometimes been misinterpreted and misused, it can help us think how God is active in both realms.

God's Two Kingdoms

Kingdom on the Left

God's creation
Secular life
Law
Justice

Kingdom on the Right

God's redemption
Spiritual life
Gospel
Forgiveness

Notice that God is creating the world on the left at the same time that the gospel is being spread from the right. These two kingdoms exist in our world and are vitally connected. Not everything on the left is corrupt and not everything on the right is good. Notice that God is in both worlds. So are Christians.

Luther saw that creation can function without direction from the church. He said on one occasion that a wise Turk can rule as well as a Christian. The creation gains its ability from the Creator even though the ability is stained by sin.

In what ways do you live in both kingdoms? Talk with another *Connections* participant about this, using the situations that follow as a guide.

- When you stop at a stop sign, you are obeying the law (Kingdom on the Left). You are not doing it necessarily because you love the people in the car coming on the other road.
- When you make certain everyone in your car is wearing a seat belt, you are doing it because it's the law (Kingdom on the Left) and because you love them (Kingdom on the Right).
- When you let your child borrow your car again after your child has had a minor accident due to negligence, you do it because you love, trust and forgive your child (Kingdom on the Right), not because it is the law.

In what ways does the church function in both kingdoms?

Jessica's Decision

In life we are often faced with difficult decisions. Many times there are no clear-cut right or wrong answers. We are tempted (and told) to “look out for number one” (ourselves), and that “it's a dog-eat-dog world.” How do we live as Christians where our decisions are often “damned if we do, damned if we don't”? Following is one example of people affected by such a situation.

Jessica, a middle manager, is told on Monday that by Friday afternoon she must name 20 people to be let go from the sales staff. She cares about the staff, but she has to do her job.

Keith and Julie have heard rumors that layoffs are coming, and are worried about their jobs. Sure, they say, you need to care about the whole company, but what about the needs of our families?

Marissa, the CEO, feels caught. Either she cuts the workforce or the company goes under. She also knows that people have criticized the growing disparity between the wages of the workers and that of the CEO, but she has made the company successful through her hard work and at great personal expense.

The board of directors say they have to watch out for the stockholders. After all, it is the stockholders' money.

Think of who else might be affected in this scenario, such as another local firm, the mayor, someone out to prove Jessica is not up to the job, the union leader, a spouse or even an inanimate object such as the stock market.



Experiencing Until Next Time

Connecting with the Congregation

Put an article in your church or synod newsletter or on their webpages about your *Connections* experience. Include quotations, examples and pictures to help others understand what *Connections* is all about. Include information about when the next unit of *Connections* will begin.

Share with a friend from the congregation some of your experiences thus far in *Connections*.

Brainstorm with the congregation outreach and education committees ways the next *Connections* unit could serve more broadly within the congregation and in the community.

Growing Together

Read Hebrews 12:11-12.

Talk about these questions with two or three others in the group:

- What does faith mean in this reading?
- What did these people risk?
- Who else might be on this list?
- Why are these people called a “cloud of witnesses”?
- Why is Jesus called “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith”?

Recall a recent action of your own that involved risk:

- What were your feelings about the unknown?
- How did you work your way through it?
- How does your faith confirm this struggle?
- In what ways does God’s covenant faithfulness give us the strength to live faithfully?

Sing or say together the hymn, “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word” (ELW 517).

In your *Connections* group, pray for one another by name, one at a time, asking God to help this person live faithfully.

Connecting With Scriptures

These passages serve as a kind of summary of what you have experienced over these sessions. Read and pray the passages as a way to wrap yourself in God’s Word as you live your life.

Read John 5.

1 Jesus asks, “Do you want to be made well?” Do you? What does that mean in your life?

2 Sometimes we want too much. Sometimes we do not want enough. Why did Jesus not only say, “Walk,” but also, “Take up your mat”?

Read Romans 6 and 7.

1 How are human beings slaves of sin? How are we now dead to sin and alive to Jesus Christ?

2 If we are set free from sin, what place do the Ten Commandments have in our daily lives of faith?

Stand up,
take up
your mat
and walk.

Should we
continue
in sin
in order that
grace
may abound?

Read Psalm 106.

1 How have you been strengthened in your trust of God's steadfast love and covenant faithfulness in these weeks?

2 Trace your own journey through the years, perhaps through some deserts, even a wilderness. How has God sustained you?

O give
thanks
to the
Lord.

Using Other Resources

The sinful desire is, from God's side, as evil as the act. For it is based on the root sin of unbelief. It asserts that God does not know how to order and distribute possessions and people.

From *The Hidden Discipline*, by Martin Marty, page 32.

Connections: Faith and Life

Unit One Living Faithfully

The Ten Commandments

Participant Resource

Authors

Norma Cook Everist

Nelvin Vos

Editorial Team

Bob Sitze

Christine E. Weiser

Carol Weiser

Advisory Team

Norma Cook Everist

Sally Simmel

Bob Sitze

Nelvin Vos

Carol Weiser

Design

Kathryn Brewer

Illustration

Joe van Severen

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Unit One

Living Faithfully

The Ten Commandments



Session One

What's Important in My Life?

Identity: Ours and God's The First and Second Commandments

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Become acquainted with each other and with *Connections*.
- Explore what it means to “have a god.”
- Explore what and whom they fear, love and trust above all things.
- Connect personally through sharing and prayer.
- Identify and compare theologies in culture and Christian theology.
- Grow in the ability to speak of faith in everyday language.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.

Getting Acquainted

This and the next section provide opportunities for group members to become better acquainted with each other. Since the lives of the other participants and you are the basis for *Connections*, time spent on getting acquainted in this first session is very important.

Have participants pair with persons they know less well. Ask members of the pairs to talk with each other about themselves, using the questions in the participant resource.

Remember that it is important for each leader to participate in this activity. Pair with another participant rather than another leader.

Give the pairs about 10 minutes to talk with each other. A “two-minute warning” at the end of eight minutes is helpful. Be somewhat flexible with time, but remember that there will be an additional opportunity for conversation during the next section.

Ask the pairs to rejoin the group. Have each person introduce his or her partner. These introductions should include the other person's name and a brief description of that person. Allow no more than two minutes each for introductions.

Beginning Where We Are

Invite the participants to take about five minutes to jot down notes in response to the questions in this section of the participant resource. Then suggest that participants pair with a different person and discuss their responses briefly. Note that they will have five minutes to talk.

When the group reconvenes, the introduction process should be kept very brief. Sharing in pairs is already significant and sufficient learning. Participants do not need to “report” everything they heard to the larger group.

As a leader, you can model the presentations by keeping the introduction of your partner succinct, no longer than 20-30 seconds.

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating. *The Small Catechism* section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.





Connecting With Daily Life

Activity One: Fear, Love and Trust

This activity gives people the opportunity to consider what they fear, love and trust above all things, or, as Luther says, “What it is to have a god.” Many matters do crowd into our hearts and minds; not all of them become “gods.” But when they become our ultimate concerns they can take the place of God. Participants will be able to relate to that from taking time to think about their daily experience.

Tell participants they will be asked three simple, basic, yet thought-provoking questions that are in the participant resource. Ask the questions one at a time, giving ample opportunity for personal reflection and taking some notes on their own thoughts. After they have had time for each of the three questions, invite them to share in pairs (or as a whole, if the group is quite small) what they care to with one another. It is up to the individual to decide what they keep private and what they tell one another. Then share as a whole group. Simply listen, keeping the environment trustworthy so people feel they can speak without judgment. Encourage people to also listen

carefully and respectfully to one another without jumping in with incidents from their own lives. Guide the discussion, but also see where it goes on its own. Help the group discover at a deeper level what it is to fear, love and trust and where God is in the midst of these very real life experiences. You (or they) may find yourselves returning to words from the catechisms.

Activity Two: Bumper Sticker Theology

This experiential learning activity can be both enjoyable and profound. Participants can enjoy this activity because they will be using a language they know and understand. They will be connecting with daily life by “doing theology” using contemporary language.

Invite the group to mention all the familiar slogans they can. You might name two of three to get them started, such as “You deserve a break today.”

Write the slogans on posterboard, whiteboard or newsprint as they are named. Ask group members to select one. (Any one of the slogans or sayings will work. All make their appeal to us on the basis of basic values and belief systems.)

Erase or cross out all slogans except the one selected. Write that one at the top left of the board. With the participants, explore fully all the messages and deeper meanings of the saying. Note the meanings in the column below the saying.

Title a second column **CHRISTIAN FAITH**. With participants, take the statement in the first column and ask, “What does our faith say about this? What are the implications of this for our faith as Christians?” For example, a message from advertising may mean, “You may be left out.” In Christian theology, Christ calls us to invite everyone into the community of believers.

Let group members do the talking. They will be able to add biblical and theological insights in their own words. Participate mostly through active listening, helping them connect and build on their thoughts, and through summarizing.



Experiencing Until Next Time

Note the questions here and suggest that participants reflect on these questions during the coming week.

Ask if there are any issues or concerns that participants would like to discuss. Invite comments on the process thus far.



Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion

to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session.

The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Connecting With Scriptures

Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John’s Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use “Connecting with Scriptures.”

Session Two

How Do I Keep Going?

Holy Work and Sabbath Rest The Third Commandment

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Know that God created both work and rest.
- Recount God's activity during the past week.
- Feel God's continuing strength.
- Cherish God's word.
- Be able to view their work in a new way and engage in Sabbath rest regularly.
- Grow in the ability to connect the language of faith with the language of daily life.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.

Beginning Where We Are

Each time participants come back together they will have much to share, both from the reflection questions and tasks in last session's "Experiencing Until Next Time" and from other things that went on during their week. The section "Beginning Where We Are" is a gathering time during which they may reconnect and focus on this session.

The three questions suggested in the participant resource point in two directions: back to the past week and forward to this session.

As a leader, you will need to balance two inclinations. The first is to let participants express themselves fully about what went on while they were apart from each other. The second is to move quickly toward the events to come during the session. Be sensitive to both as you guide this time.

Usually 10 to 15 minutes is sufficient for this part of the session. The goal is to do some catching up with each other — these recollections most likely will be the basis for discussion in this session — and to set a tone for the session.

You will be stopping the conversation for this section (and probably most sections) before participants are finished. That's OK! It is better to have the conversation end with the potential for more than for folks to become bored with it. At the same time, be aware when the conversation needs to continue. Be careful not to cut off intense or fervent discussion prematurely.

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating. *The Small Catechism* section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.

Connecting With the Faith

Connecting With Daily Life

Days of the Week

This experience is simple but powerful. Participants may not remember a particular day last week, or may need to refer to their calendars to recall what went on. Give them a few minutes to think about the week.

Tell participants that you need one volunteer to tell about his or her Monday, one to tell about Tuesday, and so forth for all the days except Sunday.

As people begin to tell about their day, note that it may take some time, perhaps as long as five minutes each. This listen-

ing time is very important. If one person seems to be going on for a long time, gently suggest that the group move on to the next day of the week.

If someone gives a particularly brief account, perhaps for as little as 30 seconds, you might say, “What happened during the time when you ...?”

You may be concerned that nothing of substance worth discussing will come up. It will! Remember, even the seemingly mundane is substantive.

The more challenging part will be when the Sunday people begin to talk about what they heard. Participants may respond only in generalities, or to the most memorable of what was said. Let the Sunday people talk about the week-day stories, but try to model a response

that is specific. For example, you might say, “Mark, when you forgot your keys and were locked out, I heard the frustration in your voice.”

Speaking faith using daily language can be hard because we don’t do it often. We tend to speak in generalities, such as, “All things work together for good to those who love God.” Give participants time. They will find helpful words to say to each other. Someone might say, “Mark, I’m sure God knows our frustration, too. Being locked out is no fun. But God’s not inside saying, ‘You fool.’ God is outside with us.”

The group may be tempted to say, “That reminds me of the time I ...” Keep the participants focused on the stories presented. There will be enough there to talk about.

Many different arenas of life will be represented in the group’s stories. Holy work includes all kinds of work. The complexity of daily life is obvious as you move from arena to arena. There are many stress points and some real struggles.

However, while one or more people may have told about a difficult time, others might describe something that made a day wonderfully refreshing. This can illustrate the rest and regeneration offered by the Sabbath in a way that is better than any abstract description of rest.

Experiencing Until Next Time

Keeping a journal is an activity that some people find easy and enjoyable. The suggestion of keeping a simple log of a week should be presented as broadly as possible. Note that this log may be in the form of a journal, or may simply be two or three sentences or phrases written each day on a Post-It™ note that describe what happened during the day. Some may journal best by posting on their blog or Facebook page. The purpose is to help participants look at the ways and the people that get them through the difficult and the joyful times.

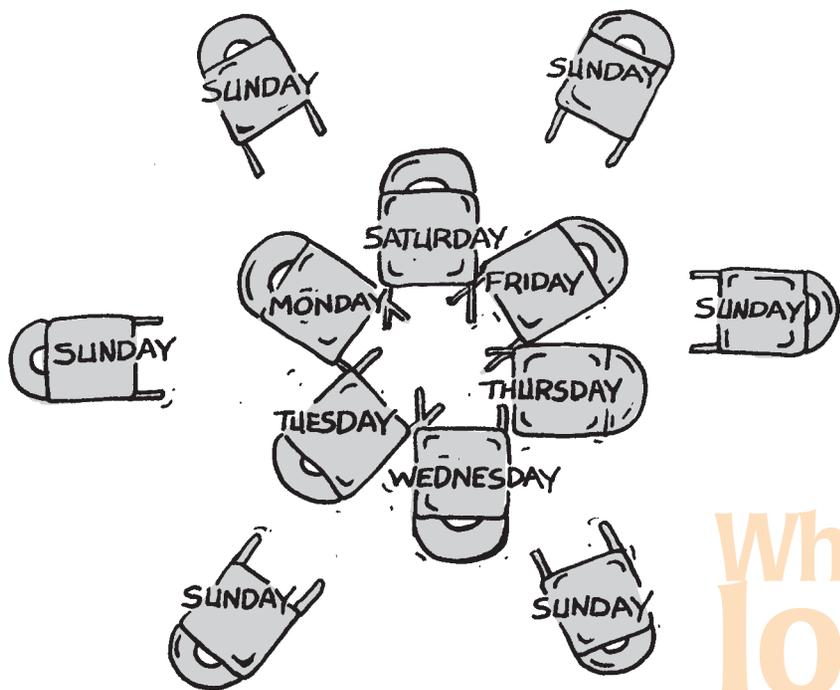


Growing Together

Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session. The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.

Connecting With Scriptures

Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John’s Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use “Connecting with Scriptures.”



What are you looking for?

Session Three

How Do I Live Faithfully with Others?

Relationships and Commitment The Fourth and Sixth Commandments

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Explore what it means to be in relationship with others.
- Identify some of their stations (roles) in their various worlds.
- Be aware of the varieties of emotions that are part of complex relationships.
- Be able to share the dilemmas and joys of their stations in the arenas of their daily lives.
- Examine the concept of vocation, or calling.
- Find empowerment in the forgiveness of sins for ministry.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.



Beginning Where We Are

The activity for this gathering and focusing time will help participants begin to identify the roles and relationships they have in their daily lives. Asking them to name people in each of the worlds listed on the figure will start their exploration of relationships. At the same time, it will help them to recognize the roles they play in these relationships.

The questions are open-ended so that participants can share at any level they choose. By continuing to build trust in the group people will begin to converse beyond the facts of names and places to the significance of faith in their interactions and relationships.

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating. *The Small Catechism* section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.



Connecting With the Faith



Stations and Vocations

Martin Luther spoke about “stations” which we might say are the roles and relationships where we live in our various worlds. Everyone has a particular station, in fact multiple stations in our complex lives. Our vocations (callings) are related to our particular stations and rooted in our new life in Christ. We are freed from the bondage of sin for servanthood.

Write the word “STATION” at the top of a board or newsprint and underneath write “ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS.” Affirm the wide variety of roles and relationships in our lives, the challenges of each, and how many stations continue to change, some even while they remain the same. For example, we may change companies for which we work. Or, we may remain parent to the same three children, but our role of parent to a toddler is different from our role of parent to a teen. Say that we need the help of brothers and sisters in Christ to help us discern our roles and relationships. List some examples of stations in your own life and then proceed to encourage them to think about their own lives.

Distribute paper. Give participants about five minutes to make the list of the roles and relationships they have in the various worlds in which they live. They may use the figure from the opening activity to suggest the relationships they have in these worlds.

After five minutes, invite participants

to turn to another *Connections* participant and talk about the list. Have them discuss one particular role in more detail.

If group members are sitting next to a spouse, invite them to move about the room and find someone else with whom to talk. Be certain that you and other leaders participate as well.

Allow about five minutes for people to talk with each other, then call the group back together.

Don't wait until everyone is finished sharing — that will never happen. Tactfully interrupt, saying that everyone will have the opportunity to continue the conversation with his or her partner in a few minutes.

Ask participants to share a few of the stations they talked about with the partners. Once again affirm the variety of stations. All are potential places for our callings to ministry, our “vocations.”

On the top right of the board or newsprint, write “VOCATIONS (CALLING)” Across from each of the “stations” in your own life which you listed before, write a call to ministry in that role or relationship. Not everything we do in life is ministry but in each of our stations there is the potential for ministry, the ‘call’ to ministry. And it is specific to the human need at the time. For example one's role may be sister-in-law, and one's call to ministry at this time might be to see what help is needed in her current health crisis. Ask participants to write their own list on the right-hand side of their paper. Give them about five minutes for this, then invite them to talk again with their partner. This second conversation will probably be at a deeper level. Allow at least 10 minutes for the

exchange.

Conclude with some general comments or discussion on the subject of station and vocation.

In Unit Two, Session Four, participants will work further on the concept of stations and vocations, seeing how vocation is rooted in the forgiveness of sins (Article Two of the Apostles' Creed).

Experiencing Until Next Time

Several activities are suggested in this section of the participant resource. The first two are activities that each participant may carry out individually. The third is suggested for the entire group.

If the participants would like to watch a film or television program together, talk about the goals of such an activity. Look together at the questions in the participant resource.

Using these as a guide, talk about the possibilities for a rental movie or television program that would lend itself to these questions. For example, you might choose a movie about relationships between parents and children. Or you might select a television sitcom that reflects today's perspective on marriage.

Be certain to make all the arrangements for the outing (time, location, carpooling and so forth) before participants leave this session.

Preparing for a Visit

Be sure to include in this section the announcement of the visit that will take place during the next session. Highlight the plans you have made and the matters you want the group to plan, noting the purpose of the visit and the possibilities for other visits in this and other units.

Make sure all participants are aware of particular details for the visit, and consider sending them a reminder before the visit.



Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session. The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John's Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use “Connecting with Scriptures.”

Session Four

How Do I Live in Dangerous Times?

Death and Life The Fifth and Seventh Commandments

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Explore the root problems of violence, stealing and killing.
- Look at these issues in today's world.
- Clarify feelings of fear, hostility and anger.
- Empathize with the person whose world they visit.
- Examine patterns of living that take advantage of others.
- Be strengthened to work for justice locally and globally.

Note

The plan for this session includes a work-site visit. Refer to the participant resource for specific planning steps.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.

Beginning Where We Are

Invite the group to reflect on what they talked during the last session together and to use the questions in the participant resource.

Use this conversation to introduce the issues of stealing and killing. Ask participants what experience they have had with dangerous situations.

This session could easily become “I have a story that’s worse than yours” as participants relate anecdotes about robberies, violence and killings they have heard about or witnessed. The objective is not simply to share horror stories or to grow more distant from the world. The goal is to go to the heart of the problems we all share.

As people talk about their experiences, listen carefully and receive what they say without comment or challenge. Sometimes, after an initial comment such as, “It sure was awful,” the person will add a corrective such as, “I guess we’re all part of the problem.”

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating. *The Small Catechism* section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.



Connecting With Daily Life

Making a Visit

One of the key elements of *Connections* is the opportunity to visit the worlds of the participants. “You don’t really know people until you have visited in their home” is an old saying that reflects the premise for the visits. When you see another person at her or his workplace — interacting with coworkers and customers, going about the tasks for which she or he was hired, using God-given gifts — you will get to know that person in a way that is not possible in a church or social setting. When you see someone at home or at the gym or at the town hall, you will get to know that person in a more complete way, and be able to support that person more fully.

For this first visit in this unit, choose a place where you spend much of your time. This may be your workplace, your home or the site of your volunteer or recreational activity. Prepare the place well beforehand (for example, at work you may need to clear the visit with a superior or manager). Plan where you will take participants and to whom you will introduce them.

At the time of the visit, give the *Connections* group a tour and a briefing, using these general descriptions as a guide:

- **Describe the activity that takes place in this world.**
- **Describe what it is that you do in this place.**
- **Demonstrate some of the activities or work, if possible.**
- **Show participants around the facility, especially those areas in which you are active.**
- **Introduce participants to others who are in this world with you, if they are present. If not, describe these people.**

After the tour and briefing, gather with the participants in a quiet place where you can talk freely. Invite participants to discuss the questions in the participant resource with each other and with you. Allow lots of time for this conversation.

If you need to visit after working hours, describe who would be in this place, and what would be happening during normal hours of operation.



Experiencing Until Next Time

Doing the first activity, “Revisiting Your Worlds,” may help them later when they decide whether they will host a visit and into which of their worlds they will invite the group.

Remind participants that they will make another visit during the next session. Ask for a volunteer to host the visit; if no one is willing to volunteer at this time, plan to contact someone in the next day or so who you think would be a good host. If necessary, the visit might also be hosted by the co-leader in this group.

The second activity, “Reading Beyond the Headlines” moves the participants out into the world in yet another way. People may each select their own news story, or, by keeping connected by e-mail, Facebook, phone or blog between sessions, they may have a running conversation about one news story that unfolds during the week.



Growing Together

Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session. The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Connecting With Scriptures

Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John’s Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use “Connecting with Scriptures.”

Session Five

What's the Truth about Lying?

Disgrace and Grace The Eighth Commandment

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Explore the many ways in which words have power.
- Recall particular instances when someone's words hurt them.
- Understand the relationship among the three components of *Connections*: life experience, faith traditions and shared faith-life.
- Appreciate the importance and power of upbuilding the neighbor.
- Develop new patterns of honest, supportive communal conversation.
- Continue building skills of observation and reflection.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.



By now the *Connections* group probably has developed its own rhythm of beginning, with conversation about the week, with prayer and with other interactions. As the program moves into the visits, group members will want to connect not only with each other, but also with the shared experiences they have had together.

How many days have passed since your first visit? Passing time colors perspectives. You and other members of the group may have forgotten some aspects of the visit, but you will also remember other aspects in new ways. You have had time for reflection. Take time to share these reflections. It will contribute yet another layer to your learnings together.

As a leader, you may want to use this opportunity to affirm the diverse ways people view the same experience. Encourage participants to receive others' viewpoints openly. When appropriate, guide people to make some theological connections. For example, ask, "In what ways was God at work through our host and through others at the place we visited?" Or ask, "What issues of stewardship of the earth did you see there?"

The objective is not to replay the visit (participants will be going on another visit in this session), but to continue to build skills of observation, listening and theological reflection.

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating. *The Small Catechism* section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.





Connecting With Daily Life

Making a Visit

This second visit is important and should take precedence. If there is time, or if the visit is held other than during the regular session time, spend more time with the questions following the catechism excerpts and with the other two activities here in this section.

Looking at a Diagram

The diagram is a useful way to help participants view and summarize their many experiences thus far. People are connected with each other in the faith, not only right here in this group, but also globally and throughout time. Ask, “What difference does that connection make to you?”

Taking Time by Yourself

This is a simple exercise, but with the potential for very deep meaning. If participants do the activity during session time, provide a safe place for them to express themselves, at first just to themselves and to God, and then, as they are ready, with one other person.

Remembering the disgrace may be easier than hearing a specific word of grace. That word of grace often needs to come from another person in the faith community.

Experiencing Until Next Time

Suggest that participants use the questions from “Taking Time by Yourself” and the reflection questions following *The Large Catechism* excerpts to observe their worlds during the coming week. Encourage them to pay attention particularly to the way people talk to and about each other. Remind them to be certain to include themselves in that observation.



Growing Together

Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session. The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Connecting With Scriptures

Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John’s Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use “Connecting with Scriptures.”

Session Six

Do I Want Too Much?

Greed and Justice The Ninth and Tenth Commandments

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Understand how coveting is basic to most other sins.
- Look at the ways in which greed and selfishness govern our world.
- Become acquainted with Luther's doctrine of the Two Kingdoms.
- Be challenged by obsession with possessions.
- Be able to interpret contemporary issues from a Two Kingdoms perspective.
- Connect with the congregation in planning for further *Connections* opportunities.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.



Use the questions in the participant resource as a guide for this opening section.

By this sixth session the group will have shaped its own particular way of beginning each week. The two visits will probably have been the most notable group experience. But there may be other things that overshadow the visits. A dramatic news event, a traumatic circumstance in the life of a member of the church community — all are ways of beginning each week. In facilitating discussion, you will want to go in the direction in which the group needs to go. You and the other *Connections* leaders want both to listen to the group's needs and to bring the group back to the core of the session.

For example, if a significant event took place in the community or world during the past week, people will want to talk about where they were at the time and what their feelings were and are. Allow time for sufficient expression, then ask questions that will help participants make connections to faith issues and to the discussion thus far. You might ask,

“How does that remind you of what we saw on the visit?” or “The issue we're going to be talking about this session is greed. Where is greed evident in this story?”

Sometimes there won't be nice, easy connections. Then you and the other leader will need to sense when enough time has been spent on talking about current events and when it is time to move on to the topic for this session.

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating. *The Small Catechism* section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.





Luther's Doctrine of Two Kingdoms

In the Kingdom on the Right, Christ brings grace and forgiveness to people who are in bondage to sin and death. This forgiveness comes through the means of grace, Word and sacraments. Force is not used in this kingdom. The only power at work is the power of the Holy Spirit.

The same God who administers the Kingdom on the Right created, protects and rules over the Kingdom on the Left: all of earthly life. This realm includes not only governments, but family, business, all stations of life and all human institutions, including the church.

The Two Kingdoms approach can help us clarify our roles and expectations. The two realms are not two different groups of people, believers and unbelievers. The Christian lives in both. Neither is the Kingdom on the Left under the law and the Kingdom on the Right under the gospel. But God works in a different way in each. The Kingdom on the Left is God's gift; all people in the world receive blessings of creation. In the Kingdom on the right, God works with law and gospel to make sin manifest so that God's merciful work in Christ brings forgiveness and new life.

This session is not a lecture on Luther's doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. It is a way to see how Christians function in the world.

Watch that participants don't place "church" only on the right hand. The church functions on both sides. It functions on the right as it speaks the gospel, but when it pays its fuel bills and elects its leaders it is functioning on the left. It has to live in the world like anyone else. Thus this schematic is not as simple as "the separation of church and state."

Confusions often arise about the Two Kingdoms. Some of the more common ones are given here.

Confusions of the Kingdom on the Left

- Calling a government "Christian." A government can bring justice, but it cannot bring salvation.
- Calling a business "Christian." A business can be honest as a part of God's creation, just as can those businesses of persons of any religion, but it cannot save.
- Believing an official should forgive sins and not exercise justice. Rulers can exercise mercy, but they cannot forgive sins.
- Believing we can save ourselves by being good citizens.

Confusions of the Kingdom on the Right

- Believing a Christian can be a better official than someone of another faith.
- Believing that one must live apart from the world in order to live a truly religious life.
- Believing work within the church is more of a ministry than service in Christ in any arena of daily life.
- Believing we should live out our faith when we are around Christians and should operate by any means necessary to compete and win in the world.

Jessica's Decision

Use the description in the participant resource to develop a role-play about making difficult decisions. The objective is to explore greed and justice when there are no obvious answers.

Invite participants to take various roles and act out the situation, perhaps setting it on Friday morning before the layoff announcement is made.

A better and more effective role-play is one that comes from a situation in the group. You might use Jessica's story as an example, then invite participants to give a real-life example of greed and justice. This might be something from their work life, family life or even a situation at church.

Ask the storyteller to describe the circumstances in detail and to identify various roles in the situation. Other participants can then act out the role-play with the storyteller serving as director.

At the end of the role-play (Jessica's or a participant's), ask each participant:

- **What did you feel in that role?**
- **What options were you weighing?**

Ask observers of the role play:

- **What did you see going on?**
- **What other deeper issues were involved?**
- **What other options for decisions did you see?**

Having the storyteller serve as the director rather than one of the actors allows the participants to seek possible solutions that the storyteller may not have recognized.



Experiencing Until Next Time

The activities suggested in this section of the participant resource provide a way for *Connections* participants to share their experiences with other members of the congregation. As you continue with the next *Connections* unit, this may draw new members to the group. Be open to them. Or, it may spark the formation of a new *Connections* group. Think of people and places for such a group and help facilitate its formation.



Growing Together

Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session. The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Connecting With Scriptures

Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John's Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use "Connecting with Scriptures."



Living Confidently

Participant Resource

*Norma Cook Everist
Nelvin Vos*



Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Unit Two
The Apostles' Creed

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General Introduction

Where is God, anyway? And what exactly is God doing?

Many of us as children probably thought that God was located about three feet above the altar or in some other spot in the church building. The writer of Psalm 139 discovered that God was everywhere. “If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me” (verses 9-10).

By taking part in a *Connections* group, you have also begun a process of discovery. *Connections* is about discovery of God, of God’s worlds and of God’s people.

Connections: Faith and Life unfolds the many worlds God is creating and redeeming. It is a discovery of God at work in the world, especially in your life and in the lives of others who participate.

There’s a saying that you don’t really know people until you have visited them where they live. In your *Connections* group, you will actually visit members of the group in their homes, in their places of work, in the neighborhoods in which they live or in their places of leisure or recreation. You will see people in new ways as you see how they live and relate to others in the worlds God is creating and redeeming for them.

Through *Connections*, you will get to know yourself better and begin to recognize and understand how your life is a ministry. You will also come to a fresh and better understanding of the faith as you observe how it relates to your occupation, your place of recreation, your community and your home. The familiar words of the Lord’s Prayer, the Apostles’ Creed, the Eucharist and Baptism will be explored as they relate to your everyday world and to the life-and-death issues you face.

And you will get to know Martin Luther better. As you study *The Large Catechism* and discuss it in the worlds you visit, you will observe how he dealt with his worlds when he came face to face with God. You will recognize that his world was very different from yours today, and yet the core issues remain the same.



About This Book

This participant resource contains questions, highlights from Luther's writings, session references and notes. It is not a textbook as such, but rather a collection of readings and learning activities with some space for your writings and reflections. The participant resource is where you can think about and record your experiences. In addition to containing the session material, the participant resource is a private place where you can insert anything you wish, in effect creating your own resource.

So let the discovery begin – the discovery of God, of God's worlds and of yourself in growth and prayer.

Introduction

Connections is about the relationship between faith and life. The real curriculum for this experience is life: your life and the lives of others in the group. *Connections* focuses on your day-to-day experiences: your joys, concerns, activities and issues. The purpose is to help you and other participants notice the worlds God is creating, saving and making holy all around you.

If daily life is the curriculum for *Connections*, then the foundation for this program is the Christian faith. Every Sunday we confess our faith by saying a creed, often the ancient Apostles' Creed. This creed is shared by millions of Christians around the world as a brief statement of the faith.

The theme of Unit Two is "Living Confidently." During the unit you will use the Apostles' Creed and its Explanation found in *The Large Catechism* by Martin Luther as the resource for the sessions. Two sessions each will be spent on the Explanation of the Three Articles: on God the Father, on Jesus Christ and on the Holy Spirit.

This is what Martin Luther says in his introduction to the creed in *The Large Catechism*:

In the Ten Commandments we have seen all that God wishes us to do or not to do. The creed properly follows, setting forth all that we must expect and receive from God. It is necessary to learn this so that we may know where and how to obtain strength for the task. If we could by our own strength keep the Ten Commandments as they ought to be kept we would need neither the creed nor the Lord's Prayer.

We shall briefly sum up the entire creed in three articles, according to the three persons of the Godhead, to whom all that we believe is related. The first article, of God the Father, explains creation; the second, of the Son, redemption; the third, of the Holy Spirit, sanctification. Hence the creed may be briefly comprised in these few words: "I believe in God the Father, who created me; I believe in God the Son, who redeemed me; I believe in the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies me."

One God and one faith, but three persons, and therefore three articles or confessions.

In this unit you will engage in activities such as reading, discussing, imagining, personal sharing and writing. You will participate in at least one off-site visit — a chance to see the daily worlds of members of your group. Above all, you will find new voices in your life, new ways to see God acting in your world and new directions for your sense of mission.

And in all these activities you will meet God, working alongside you in the worlds you inhabit. In prayer you will find God there with you, and draw strength from the knowledge that God stays with you throughout each day.

Unit Two Living Confidently The Apostles' Creed



Session One

What in the World Is God Doing?

God the Creator and Preserver The First Article of the Apostles' Creed

Going to the
Heart
of the Matter

In this session, we begin to examine the First Article:

**I believe in God, the Father
almighty, creator of heaven
and earth.**

What in the world is God doing?

Most of the time most of us believe that God is working in the world. But beyond that general statement, we don't probe very much. Some of us have made too wide a gulf between the sacred and the secular.

At root level, the real question is, Where do we think God is and where do we think God is not?

We proclaim loudly that God is thoroughly alive in the world. But in our actual world, as we design computer programs, empty bed pans, sell cars and vacuum carpets, we wonder what in the world God is doing.

In the First Article of the Apostles' Creed, we find the answers to our questions resting inside the assurance that God is working in the world at all times and in all places.

Getting Acquainted

Choose as a partner someone in the group that you do not know well. Ask each other the following:

- What is your name?
- What are some of the places you spend your time?
- What is one new insight you've had about yourself in the past year?

Give yourself time to discuss these questions in some depth.

After this time, rejoin the group. Introduce your partner. These introductions should include the other person's name and a brief description of that person.



Beginning Where We Are

Reflect back on the past week and think about these three questions:

● **Where were you Tuesday at 2:00 in the afternoon?**

● **What were you doing there?** (Not just "I was at the office," but "I was at the office and feeling pressure to get a project done.")

● **What was God doing there?** (Of course we can't know that, but what do you think God might have been doing there? For example, "God was right there in the midst of that pressure.")

Ask the same three questions, for Friday evening at 8:00 and Sunday morning at 10:30 (the pressures of Sunday morning may be no less than Tuesday afternoon).

- **Where was I?**
- **What was I doing, really doing there?**
- **What was God doing in that place?**

	Where was I?	What was I doing?	What was God doing in that place?
Tuesday 2:00pm			
Friday 8:00pm			
Sunday 10:30am			

Note your answers. After reflecting on these questions, share your responses with one other person in the group. Share only what you feel comfortable sharing and talk about your reflections with each other. Then share some of your comments with the rest of the group.

**I believe in God, the Father
almighty, creator of heaven and
earth.**

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

I believe that God has created me together with all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul: eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses; reason and all mental faculties. In addition, God daily and abundantly provides shoes and clothing, food and drink, house and farm, spouse and children, fields, livestock, and all property—along with all the necessities and nourishment for this body and life. God protects me against all danger and shields and preserves me from all evil. And all this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all! For all of this I owe it to God to thank and praise, serve and obey God. This is most certainly true.

**Large Catechism
(Excerpt Summary)**

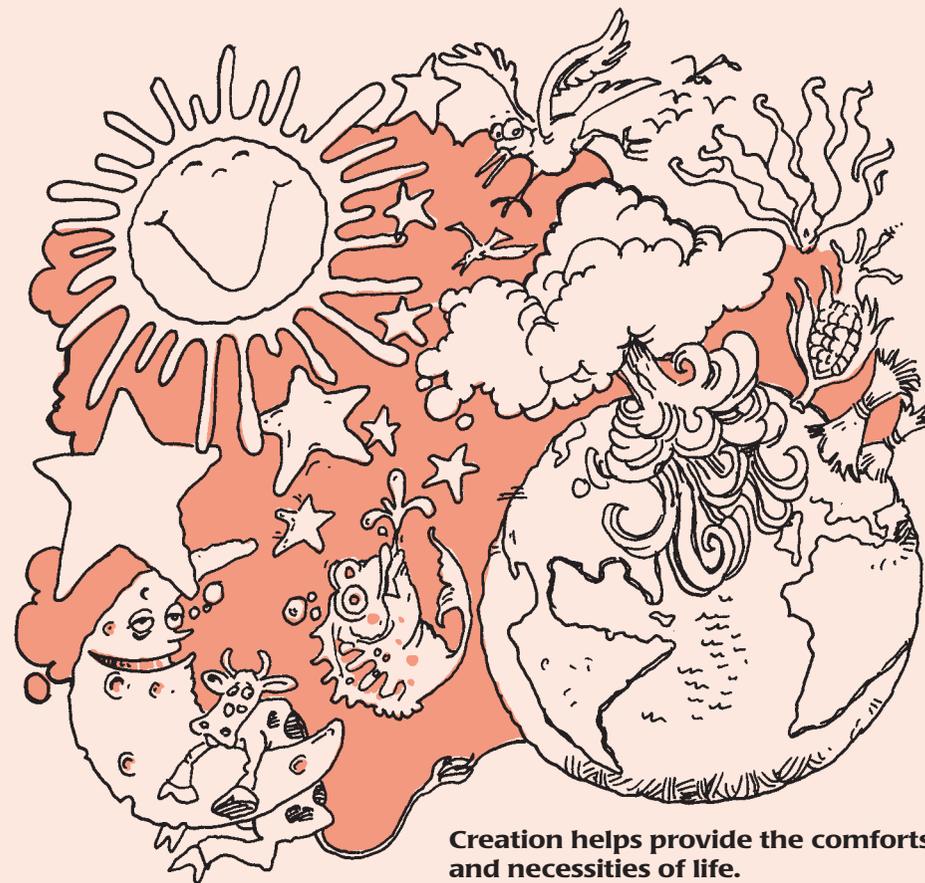
These few words about the First Article give us a brief description of the Creator God, God's nature, will and work. What kind of being is God? What does God do? How can we praise or portray or describe God in such a way as to make God known? God made heaven and earth and there is no one else who could so create.

I hold and believe that I am a creature of God. Besides, God makes all creation help provide

the comforts and necessities of life — sun, moon and stars, day and night, air, fire, water, the earth and all that it brings forth, birds and fish, beasts, grain and all kinds of produce.

God gives all physical and temporal blessings — good government, peace and security. Thus we learn that none of us has life by ourselves nor can we preserve any of them, however small and unimportant. All of this is comprehended in the word “Creator.”

God makes all creation help provide the comforts and necessities of life, sun, moon and stars, day and night, air, fire, water, the earth and all that it brings forth, birds and fish, beasts, grain and all kinds of produce.



Creation helps provide the comforts and necessities of life.

Reflection Questions

- 1** What fascinates you about creation?
- 2** Think about all the things in your daily life that God creates. What is particularly a blessing to you?
- 3** Everyone experiences creation. But how can we describe this Creator God in such a way as to make God known to others as the God of all?

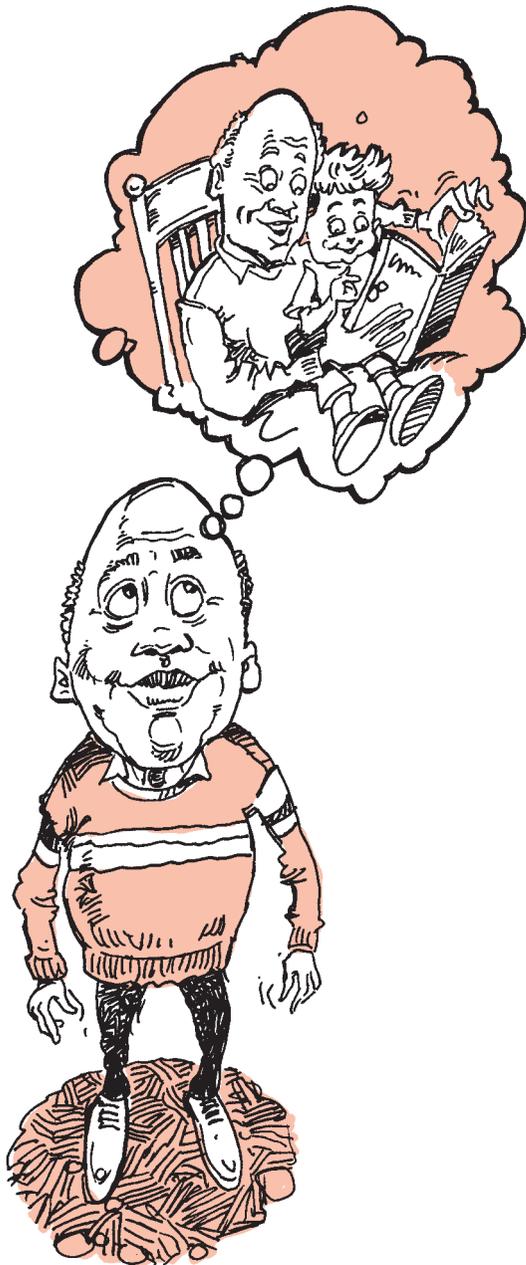
Connecting With r Daily Life

Explore some of your views about creation, focused on these questions:

- What are some of your earliest images of God?
- How have your images of God changed over the years?
- How and where do you see God the Creator at work? What dilemmas and struggles does this raise for you?

A Mind's-Eye Journey

To look at creation, you and the rest of the group will take a mind's-eye journey into a particular place where you spend time. This might be your workplace, your home, the locations for the volunteer organization you serve or a community center. Listen carefully to the instructions as your leader reads them. Let your mind and imagination roam freely.



After taking the mind's-eye journey, look again at Luther's explanation of the First Article of the creed. With another person, talk about questions such as these:

Luther: God has given me and still preserves my body and soul with all their powers.

Me: How does God do that in the place I thought about?

Luther: God provides me with food and clothing, home and family, daily work and all I need from day to day.

Me: Where is that happening in my life, even if I'm under- or unemployed?

Luther: God also protects me in time of danger and guards me from all evil.

Me: How can I believe this about God when I am being hurt by some of the evil in my place?

Luther: How can I describe God?

Me: How WOULD I describe God?

Experiencing Until Next Time

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, once said, "Don't make the parish [congregation] your world; make the world your parish." One of the ways in which we might follow Wesley's advice is by global awareness: the recognition that we are part of God's whole world and that the world is interconnected in many ways.

Before the next session, make a connection with God's creating work in another part of the world. You might see a film about another country, talk on the internet with someone from an unfamiliar place or read an article about another part of the world. Note both the differences and the connections to your own world.

Growing Together

The psalms give praise to God and also tell us who God is and what God is doing. With another person, read aloud Psalm 29, alternating verses. As you do so, think about the ways in which the psalmist is describing God. What is God like to the psalmist? What is God doing?

Say this prayer together:

O God, we live in awe of your power, concerned about the ways we use it. Remind us that we are your creatures and that what you do is good. We thank you that we can know you and praise you, through the One who came to live among us, Jesus Christ. Amen

Read Psalm 104.

1 Hear the poetic language celebrating God's creative work. Move from these words of an ancient people to your own prayer to praise your Creator God.

**Bless the Lord,
O my soul.
O Lord my God, you are very great.**

2 The psalm ends, "People go out to their work and to their labor until the evening." Give thanks to God for all kinds of work.

Connecting With Scriptures

As you read or pray these selections of the Bible together with other participants or alone, use the accompanying questions to discover how the Scriptures connect the creation with the Creator and you to both of them.

Read John 6:1-24.

1 How does Christ use you to feed hungry people?

2 In what ways does God's love go beyond God's work of creating?

Read Romans 8.

1 Where do you see the creation "groaning in labor pains"?

2 How does God want to "set creation free"? How are you called to participate in God's setting creation free in your various places in God's world?

Using Other Resources

God [created the world] not because God came across humankind as an object worthy of love. Humanity was created as a subject God chose to love.

From *The Hidden Discipline*, by Martin Marty, page 44.

Session Two

Is Anywhere Safe Anymore?

God the Protector and Defender The First Article of the Apostles' Creed

In this session we continue to explore the First Article of the creed:
I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

¹ Why do bad things happen to good people? Why are innocent people victims of random acts of violence?

These ancient questions are still something each of us asks. We wonder, "If God is good, then God must not be all-powerful. If God is all-powerful, then God must not be good."

These questions could make us feel unsafe. Is God really a Protector God? And exactly whom does God defend?

In his early years, Luther believed that the disasters in the world were due to sins. But when he tried hard to make up for his sins, and bad things still happened, he felt like an even greater failure. He concluded that God was an angry, wrathful God.

At one point Luther said, "I hate God." It wasn't until he admitted his hatred for God that he discovered the meaning of God's grace for the forgiveness of sins. God's greatest control may be to allow us to have freedom.

Control is an issue for all of us. We may not think we want to control others, but when we are out of control we feel vulnerable. We want a God who can keep control of the world for us, yet we want to be creators, too. The First Article of the creed helps us resolve that dilemma.



We want a God who can keep control of the world for us, yet we want to be creators, too.

Beginning Where We Are

In the previous session, you were asked to make a connection with people in another part of the world. Think about the place you chose to explore. What is an example of beauty in that place? What is an example of violence that took place in that part of the world? What are some other recent examples of the need for control, the lack of control or evidence of control?

Talk about the following questions with another person:

- How would you explain the acts of violence you identified?
- In what ways do you question God's love or caring for the world?
- Is God both angry and grieving? Why do you think this way?
- If God is in control, what's left for us to do?

Connecting With the Faith

The First Article

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

I believe that God has created me together with all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul: eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses; reason and all mental faculties. In addition, God daily and abundantly provides shoes and clothing, food and drink, house and farm, spouse and children, fields, livestock, and all property—along with all the necessities and nourishment for this body and life. God protects me against all danger and shields and preserves me from all evil. And all this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all! For all of this I owe it to God to thank and praise, serve and obey God. This is most certainly true.

Large Catechism

(Excerpt Summary)

We confess in this First Article that God not only has given us all that we have and see before our eyes, but also daily guards and defends us against every evil and misfortune, warding off all sorts of danger and disaster.

Hence, since everything we possess — and everything in heaven and on earth besides — is daily given and sustained by God, it inevitably follows that we are to

love, thank and praise God without ceasing and devote all things to the service of God.

How few people believe this article. We all pass over it, hear it, recite it, but we neither see nor con-

sider what the words enjoin on us. If we believed with our whole heart, we would also act accordingly and not swagger about and brag and boast as if we had life, riches, power, honor, and such things of ourselves, as if we ourselves were to be feared and served. This perverse world misuses all these blessings and gifts from God solely for its own pride and greed, pleasure and enjoyment.

We need to study this article and God's Word daily so that everything we see should remind us of it. When we escape distress or danger, we should recognize that this is God's doing. Then our hearts will be warmed and kindled with gratitude to God.

This very briefly is the meaning of the First Article. This is an excellent knowledge, but an even greater treasure. The Creator God has not only abundantly provided for us in this life but has showered us with inexpressible eternal treasures through the Son and Holy Spirit, as we shall hear.

If we believed with our whole heart, we would also act accordingly and not swagger about and brag and boast as if we had life, riches, power, honor and such things of ourselves, as if we ourselves were to be feared and served.

Reflection Questions

1 How have you experienced God as Protector and Defender?

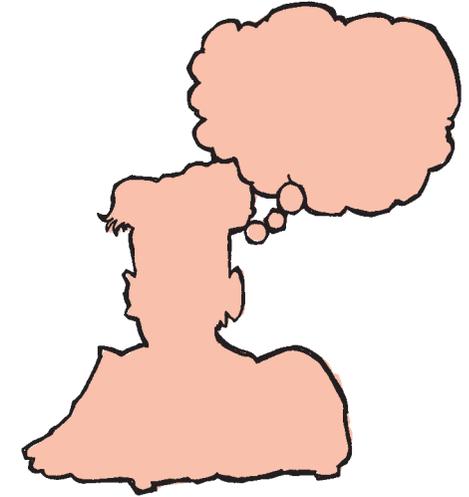
2 When and why have you doubted this?



Activity One: Taking Another Mind's-Eye Journey

During the last session you took a mind's-eye journey to a place where you spend time. Listen carefully to the instructions as you return to that place today. After the journey is completed, talk about some of the following questions with another person:

- **What if God stopped protecting creation for a moment?**
- **What happened to the world in your mind when God stopped thinking about it?**



Activity Two: Hearing a Creation Story Backwards

With your eyes closed, listen thoughtfully as you hear a creation story read backwards. Then talk about these questions with your partner:

- **As you heard the story, what impressions did you have?**
- **Do you see the creation receding to nothingness or receding to evil? Why?**
- **What would be your plans if you disappeared from creation, that is, if God had not created you?**

Experiencing Until Next Time

Think about your schedule for the week ahead. Identify one thing you can do before the next session to protect, sustain or preserve creation, including what you might already be doing as part of your daily work.

- **What is one thing I can do?**
- **What steps do I need to take to achieve that goal this week?**

Read Psalm 27 or Psalm 28.

One Thing I Can Do:

Growing Together

Discuss the following:

- **What was God like for the psalm writer?**
- **How have you experienced God in some of the ways the psalmist describes?**

Write a brief prayer with your small group that reflects the psalmist's thoughts and your conversation. Close with this prayer.

Using Other Resources

This is not natural, this portraying of a self-emptying God. It costs God nothing to share sets of proofs or witnesses to God's own existence. But our soul is athirst for God, not for proofs of God's existence or character; we seek a person, not things. Giving of one's self costs. And God's giving ... is the convincing center of Christianity.

From *The Hidden Discipline*, by Martin Marty, page 44.

Connecting With Scriptures

As you read or pray these sections of the Bible, see how each of them opens up your images of who God is and what is God's work.

Read John 6:25-70.

- 1 What are you looking for by being a follower of Jesus?
- 2 How is the work of the Creator God, who feeds and preserves you, connected to Christ?

Read Romans 9.

- 1 Who are you to resist God's will? Think about God's mercy in relation to God's wrath.
- 2 When and where have you seen or felt God's power, God's patience, God's promise or God's protection?

Read Psalm 85.

- 1 How does God protect, defend and restore you?
- 2 How can you deal with both God's indignation and God's steadfast love?
- 3 How is God's protection always rooted in God's forgiveness?

Restore us again,
O God of our salvation.

Session Three

Who Is This Jesus to You?

Jesus the Christ

The Second Article of the Apostles' Creed

In this session, we begin to examine the Second Article of the creed:

And [I believe] in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our LORD, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell. On the third day Jesus rose [again]; he ascended into heaven, seated at the right hand of God, the almighty Father, from where he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

One of the places where our faith meets daily life is this question that Jesus asked: "Who do people say that I am?" One way to answer the question is to recall in your mind the names that you cherish for Jesus, the ones that you gather together as a reminder of the faith God has given you.

Some of the names given to Jesus in the Scriptures answer that question. They include the familiar — Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God, Son of Man, Son of David, the Messiah, Savior, the Word of God — as well as the unfamiliar. Each name reveals something about Jesus, something important for those who have faith in him.

Who do you think Jesus is? What role does this Jesus play in your life? In the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed you will find some of the answers to these important, faith-filled questions of life.



At the end of the previous session, you were asked to name one thing you could do before this session to protect, sustain or preserve creation. With another person, talk about how you undertook that task during the week.

Sessions One and Two also discussed ways in which God is present in the world. In this session you will think of the places where you see Jesus in your various worlds. With another participant, explore the following questions:

- Where do you see Jesus during your week? (For example, in your work, family, friends and so forth.)
- What role does Jesus play in your worlds?
- How does having Jesus in your life affect your decisions?
- In whom have you seen Jesus? In what ways have you seen Jesus in these persons?



Connecting With the r Faith

The Second Article

**And [I believe] in Jesus Christ,
God's only Son, our LORD,
who was conceived by the
Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin**

**Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was
crucified, died, and was buried; he
descended into hell. On the third day
Jesus rose [again]; he ascended into
heaven, seated at the right hand of God,
the almighty Father, from where he will
come to judge the living and the dead.**

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

**I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father in
eternity, and also a true human being, born of the Virgin Mary, is
my LORD. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human
being. He has purchased and freed me from all sins, from death,
and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with
his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death.
He has done all this in order that I may belong to him, live under
him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, inno-
cence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives
and rules eternally. This is most certainly true.**

**Those tyrants and jailers
(disobedience, sin, death
and all evil) now have been
routed, and their place has
been taken by Jesus Christ,
the Lord of life and right-
eousness and every good
and blessing.**

Large Catechism (Excerpt Summary)

Here we learn to know the second person of the Godhead, and we see how Jesus has completely given himself to us, withholding nothing. This article is very rich and far-reaching, but in order to treat it briefly and simply, we shall take up one phrase which contains the substance of the article; from it we shall learn how we are redeemed, "in Jesus Christ, our Lord."

What is it to "become a Lord?" It means that Jesus has redeemed me from sin, from the devil, from death and from all evil. Before this I was condemned to death and entangled in sin.

We lay under God's wrath.

There was no counsel, no help, no comfort until this only and eternal Son of God, in his unfathomable goodness, had mercy on our misery and wretchedness and came from heaven to help us. Those tyrants and jailers (disobedience, sin, death and all evil) now have been routed, and their place has been taken by Jesus Christ, the Lord of life and righteousness and every good and blessing. He has snatched us, poor lost creatures, from the jaws of hell, won us, made us free, and restored us to God's favor and grace, that he may rule us by his righteousness, wisdom, power, life and blessedness.

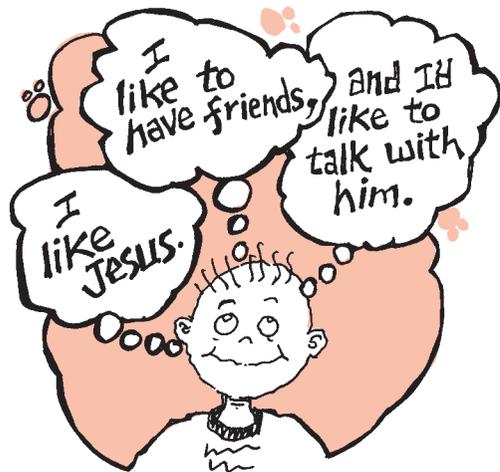
Reflection Questions

1 In what ways have you been "entangled in sin"? How have you experienced God's mercy through Christ?

2 What experience have you had with "sin, death and the power of the devil"?

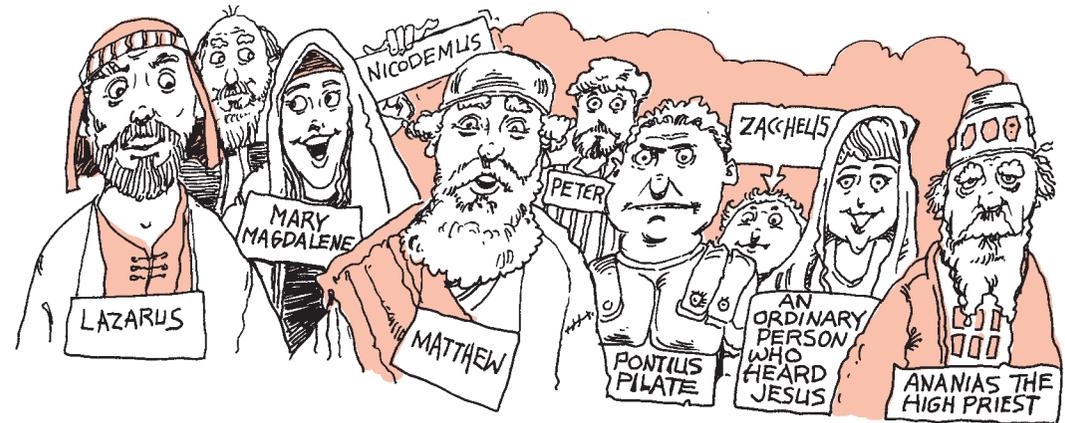
Activity One: Who Is Jesus to You?

Draw a picture or mold a shape of yourself at an early age. With word or thought balloons, or a few notes on a separate sheet of paper, show your relationship with Jesus. With another participant, talk about what you have depicted.



After a few moments, use the same medium to show your relationship with Jesus as an adult. Talk about the similarities and differences between your younger and older understandings and attitudes about Jesus. Use the questions here to help you share your thoughts:

- **Who is Jesus to you now? Is Jesus Lord? Close friend? Our images of Jesus change as we grow. For example, you may no longer picture Jesus as someone who holds your hand, but may now think of Jesus as someone easy to talk to.**
- **Look at the accounts of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Do you have a favorite story about Jesus? Tell about it.**
- **Your relationship with Christ may be both a comfort and a struggle. Throughout history, people have had all sorts of reactions to Jesus. Your encounter with Christ tells you as much about yourself as it does about Jesus. Tell about a time of your own faith struggle.**



Activity Two: Taking a Different Perspective of Jesus

With another participant, select a biblical person close to Jesus whose viewpoint about Jesus might in some ways be similar to your own.

Characterize Jesus from the perspective of the person you selected. How does this change your image of Jesus?

Activity Three: A Visit to a World of a Participant

During this session you and the other *Connections* participants will be visiting a world of one of the participants. This might be the person's place of work or volunteer activity, home and family, or a place of recreation.

The purpose of the visit is to help you and other *Connections* participants get acquainted with a particular world of the host and thereby get to know the person better. It is also — and perhaps more importantly — a way for you to recognize that God is present creating and redeeming this particular world.

The visits in this and other sessions will provide you and other *Connections* participants with an opportunity to witness God and God's people at work in a particular place. The visits will also allow you to recognize ways in which God is present in this particular world as Creator and Redeemer.

Making a Visit



1 As you tour the place where your host has invited you, ask:

- What are some of the problems in this world?
- What are some of the satisfactions?

2 Listen carefully as your host describes the world and what happens there. Reflect on these questions:

- What are some of the roles (stations) that the host fills here?
- What do you see as the host's calling?
- What works of compassion and justice take place here?

3 Make the faith connections. Reflect on these questions:

- What is God the Creator doing? That is, what new things are being created and what is being maintained?
- What is God the Redeemer doing here? What would be different here if Christ had not been crucified and resurrected?

Growing Together

Read aloud
Philippians 2:5-11.

Talk about how this passage helps you see ways in which Jesus is present in the place you visited or in a place where you spend your time.

Say this prayer together:

O God, who was before the worlds began and who still is, we live in awe of your being. Remind us that we are made by you and that our lives are good because of you. We thank you that we can know you and praise you, through the One who came to live among us, Jesus Christ. Amen

Experiencing Until Next Time

Keep a journal until the next session. Recall the times during the week when you see how your faith in Christ affects your perceptions and decisions. (For example, when passing a homeless person, seeing a mother angry with her child or hearing a racist joke at work). Plan to share any observations at the next session.

What does it mean to have Jesus in your life?

How does being a Christian affect your view of the world?

Because the Bible is organized around God's saving actions in Jesus Christ, there are innumerable places you can learn more about who Jesus is. Several references are included here. As you pray and read them, consider how Christ comes to your life and blesses it. Use the questions for individual or group reflection.

Read John 7.

1 When have you searched for Jesus and felt him just beyond your reach?

2 Have you ever felt misunderstood because of your faith? When? What were the circumstances?

3 Why do you think the world is so afraid of Jesus?

Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but **YOUR** time is always here."

Read Romans 5.

1 What elements of the life of Christ connect you to him? (For example, his obedience, his suffering or his love.)

2 When have you felt like an enemy of God?

3 When have you experienced Christ "coming at the right time" in your life?

while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Read Psalm 22.

1 How does this psalm reflect Jesus' humiliation, his cry from the cross and his death for you and for all people?

2 Reflect on some suffering, just or unjust, in your own life. Remember these words, "Do not be far from me, for trouble is near."

My God,
my God,
why
have you
forsaken
me?

Using Other Resources

The creed takes the question away from the realms of dogma and liturgy and turns to personal life. It asks, "Has your life a Lord? Is Christ your Lord? Does the answer make a difference?"

From *The Hidden Discipline*,
by Martin Marty, page 49.

Session Four

How Can We Live in a Death-Defying Culture?

From Death to Life The Second Article of the Apostles' Creed

In this session, we continue in the Second Article of the creed: **And [I believe] in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our LORD, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell. On the third day Jesus rose [again]; he ascended into heaven, seated at the right hand of God, the almighty Father, from where he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

Going to the Heart of the Matter

The subject of death has remained one of the last unmentionables in youth-craving North America. Some people take the sting out of mortality by talking about

'passing away.' Others attempt to quickly leave grief behind by 'moving on.'

In our death-denying, death-defying culture, Christians need to understand that their faith is about life, new life, powerful life over death. By exploring beginnings and endings in this part of the Apostles' Creed, we can learn to understand both life and death.



Beginning Where We Are

At the end of the previous session, you were invited to keep a journal to reflect on your life as a Christian. Today, talk with another person about specific examples of how your faith in Christ may have altered your perceptions.

- How does your faith alter your perception of death and dying?
- How does Christ's birth, death and resurrection free you to engage in your call to life-giving mission in the world?

As our lives change, a part of us dies. Although there are other balancing "births" — new friends, new varieties of work — we cannot deny that each day we leave a past we cannot recover. Understanding these small births and deaths may help us to ease into the questions of life's final death.



With a partner, discuss questions such as the following:

- What are some new beginnings you see coming into your life in the next year or so?
- In what ways do you sense God's ongoing creative work in these beginnings yet to come?
- What are some changes you see ahead that will bring some endings?

And [I believe] in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our LORD, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell. On the third day Jesus rose [again]; he ascended into heaven, seated at the right hand of God, the almighty Father, from where he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father in eternity, and also a true human being, born of the Virgin Mary, is my LORD. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being. He has purchased and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. He has done all this in order that I may belong to him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true.

Large Catechism

(Excerpt Summary)

The word "Lord" simply means the same as Redeemer, that is, he who has brought us back from the devil to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and now keeps us safe there. Jesus became human, conceived and born without sin, of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin, that he might become Lord over sin; moreover, he suffered, died and was buried that he might make satisfaction for me and pay what I owed, not with silver and gold but with his own precious blood. He did none of these things for himself, nor had he any need of them. Afterward he rose again from the dead, swallowed up and devoured death, and finally ascended into heaven.

The proper place to explain all these different points is not the

brief children's sermons, but rather the longer sermons throughout the year, especially at the times appointed (Christmas, Lent, Easter, Ascension) for dealing at length with such articles as the birth, passion, resurrection and ascension of Christ.

Indeed, the entire Gospel that we preach depends on the proper understanding of this article. Upon it all our salvation and blessedness are based, and it is so rich and broad that we can never learn it fully.

The word "Lord" simply means the same as Redeemer, that is, he who has brought us back from the devil to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and now keeps us safe there.

Reflection Questions

1 Jesus "brought us back from death to life." What does that mean on a daily basis in the struggles you face?

2 There are many ways of talking about Jesus' act of redemption: "snatching us from the jaws of hell," "paying the price," "swallowing up death." What others can you think of? Which of these phrases speaks to you?

3 How does following the church year in the liturgy help you walk with Christ daily through the year?

Connecting With Daily Life **Talking About Grief Experiences**

The Second Article prompts us to think about death as well as life, particularly about redemption and its connection to our stations and vocations.

Grief Experiences

Family Member

Co-Worker

Neighbor

Friend

High School Classmate

Stranger

Other: _____

Talk with another person about a recent experience with the loss of someone close to you. Jot down some notes on the following:

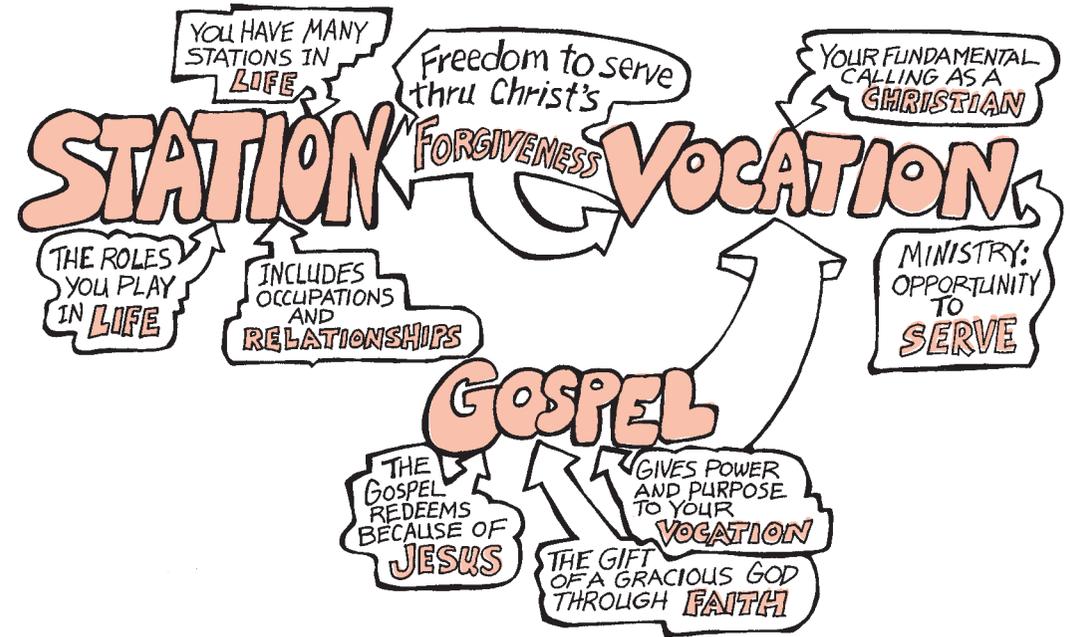
- What were the circumstances of this person's death?
- In what ways was this person close to you?
- What did you feel when you learned of the death?
- What gifts did this person bring to your life?
- What changes does the death make in your own life?

Thinking About Stations and Vocations

Think about the roles you play in your life (for example, parent, friend, plumber, accountant, nurse). These are the *stations*, Luther's word for the locations and roles in your life. Station does not mean class, status or lot in life.

Now think about your *vocation* in these stations. Vocation is rooted in Christ's work of redemption, freeing us for our calling as Christians. For example, in your station as a parent, you may fulfill the vocation of self-esteem builder or forgiver.

The gospel calls all of us to live out redemption in our stations. The calling is not to parenthood, but rather to live out the gospel in our stations as parents. A person can move from some stations to oth-



ers — for example, from teacher to repair person — but the calling to live the gospel always continues into the new station.

We are given the permanent calling in our Baptism to live out the gospel whatever our station. Because the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news in a specific situation, Jesus' work as Redeemer can be expressed in the way you live out your calling.

With another person, identify several stations you have and the vocation you live in each of these. Use the chart here to see how, in one of your stations, you might minister with the gospel with situations in need of redemption.

One of my stations:

DEATH
Bondage
Rebellion
Alienation
Guilt
Brokenness

LIFE
Freedom
Restoration
Community
Forgiveness
Wholeness

How Christ might use me to minister in this station:

Experiencing Until Next Time

During the coming week, view a film or see a TV program that deals with the subject of death. Think about the experience in terms of the following questions.

- How does each of the characters view mortality?
- As you envision yourself as one of the characters, how might your faith keep you strong?
- How might your perception change when your character's mortality is a result of lifestyle choices? What role does faith play in that perception?

Growing Together

Read Psalm 88.

Think about your own death, then respond to the following:

- How do you imagine yourself dying?
- Can you think of anyone who has died the way you expect to die?
- In what activities do you engage that may affect your way of dying?
- When you think about your own death, what are your reasons for fear (or the lack of fear)?
- If you were to express your feelings right now as a “psalm,” you would ...

Read Psalm 6 slowly. Pause after verse 7. Think about this situation with another person: Suppose the psalmist actually died shortly after writing this part of the psalm. Do you think it would be unusual for a person to die in despair with no apparent sign of help? Why do you think God would allow a psalm such as this to be in the Bible?

It is fairly easy to feel confident and speak of resurrection when times are good. But how do we feel in times of despair? Those latter times are possibly times when we are most honest in our expression of feelings.

Read the remainder of the psalm (verses 8-10). What hope is expressed in these verses?

Use Psalm 130:1-2 as a closing prayer:

Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord!
Lord, hear my voice! Amen

Connecting With Scriptures

Death is a reality in Scripture. In the biblical selections here you will see that God's will for life is a powerful truth in which we can live hopefully every day. Pray or read them, and use the associated questions as a way of connecting the Scriptures to your life.

Read John 8.

1 What is the “truth” of Christ? How does living in the light of Christ free you from condemning others?

2 Why did people need to kill Jesus? Why are some people so afraid of the light, truth and life he gives?

Read Romans 6.

1 How does “being buried with Christ and raised with him from the dead” empower you to live differently — to “walk in the newness of life”?

2 Talk to a friend about your faith in the hope of the resurrection.

I am the light of the world,
Whoever follows me
will never walk
in darkness
but will have the
light of life.
The wages of
sin is death,
but the free gift
of God is
eternal
life
in Christ
Jesus.

Read Psalm 23.

1 Pray each phrase of this familiar psalm as though you had never said the words before. Picture your life experience in the images.

2 How does the assurance of dwelling with God change the way you view life?

Even though I walk
through the
darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me.

Using Other Resources

Life organized around the forgiveness of sins; that is Luther's idea of the call.

From *Our Calling*, by Einar Billing, page 11.

Session Five

What Makes Us Holy?

The Breath of the Spirit The Third Article of the Apostles' Creed

In this session, we begin to explore the Third Article of the creed: **I believe in the Holy Spirit, one holy Christian church, the community of the saints, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the flesh, and eternal life. Amen.**

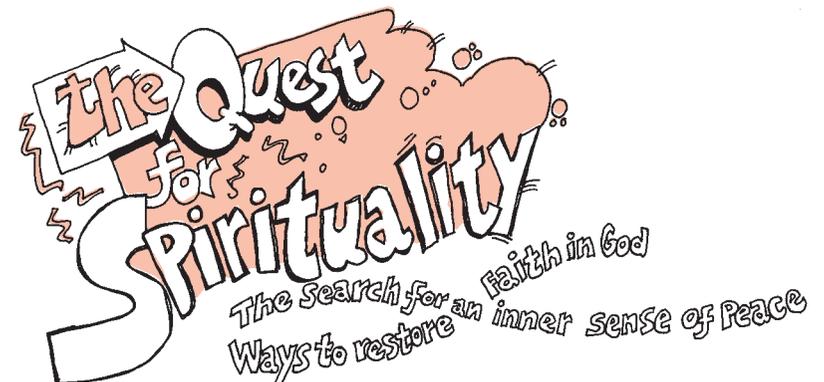
Going to the Heart of the Matter

¹ The quest for spirituality is a popular journey today. People take different paths along this pilgrimage. Maybe they are searching for a sense of inner peace or comforting answers. They may be seeking ways to restore their faith in God. In any of these paths there emerge questions of faith, expressed in languages of spiritual realities and

languages of faith.

In his *Confessions*, Augustine wrote about these questions, this deep hunger, "Thou hast made us for thyself so that our hearts are restless until they rest in thee." The issue can be put more directly: How can I become holy? Do I really want to live a holy life? Do I really want the breath of the Spirit to breathe within me?

The straightforward summary language of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed anticipates these questions and helps us find direction and purpose to guide our lives toward God's will for the world.



Beginning Where We Are

At the end of the previous session, you were encouraged to watch a film or TV program that dealt with the theme of death. If you were able to engage in this activity, review the questions in Session Four as a starting place for this session.

Now think about the ways in which the characters in that or any other recent video might have demonstrated a kind of “holiness.” In what ways were they “holy”?

Now think about your life:

- Whom would you classify as “holy”? (These may be persons living now or in the past.)
- Which of these people, if any, live in a world this *Connections* group has visited?

All About HOLY

- Derived from the Hebrew word “Kadosh,” meaning “separated”
- Things, people, events that are set apart for sacred purposes
- God’s holiness is seen in God’s “total otherness”
- Worthy of praise and high esteem
- Associated with divine power
- Synonyms: pure, righteous, godly, hallowed, consecrated, saintly

- What is there about this person that makes him or her holy?
- What is the relationship between this person’s and God’s holiness?

Connecting With the r Faith

The Third Article

I believe in the Holy Spirit, one holy Christian church, the community of the saints, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the flesh, and eternal life. Amen.

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my LORD or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as the Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers. On the Last Day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.

Large Catechism (Excerpt Summary)

To this article I cannot give a better title than “Sanctification.” Many other kinds of spirits are mentioned in the Scriptures. But God’s Spirit alone is called Holy Spirit, the one who sanctified and still sanctifies us. As the Father is called Creator and the Son is called Redeemer, so on account of this work the Holy Spirit must be called Sanctifier, the One who makes holy. The Holy Spirit effects our sanctification through the communion of saints or Christian church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. The Holy Spirit first leads us into the holy community, placing us upon the bosom of the church, where God preaches to us and brings us to Christ.

Neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ or believe in him without the Holy Spirit. The work is finished and completed, Christ has won the treasure for us, but if the work remained hidden and no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost. In order that this treasure might not be buried but put to use and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed.

The Holy Spirit first leads us into the holy community, placing us upon the bosom of the church, where God preaches to us and brings us to Christ.

The Holy Spirit reveals and preaches the Word, and by it illuminates and kindles hearts so that they grasp and accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it. Where Christ is not preached there is no

Holy Spirit to create, call and gather the Christian church, and outside it no one can come to the Lord Christ.

Reflection Questions

1 In what ways has the Holy Spirit surprised you?

2 How has the Holy Spirit given you help and comfort?

3 What barriers in your life have been broken down by the Holy Spirit?

4 How are you open to the breath of the Spirit within yourself?

Connecting With Daily Life Activity One: The Languages of Faith

Each of us speaks familiar languages in the worlds in which we live. The language of faith, particularly theological terms, can sound different in these places. Still, the Holy Spirit is ready to help us speak words of faith in terms people from many different worlds can understand.

Try acting out a situation like this:

- Select a typical daily life setting in which you are comfortable.
- Choose two other individuals from your Connections group to participate in a “conversation” about a recent popular movie or television program. The first time around, you must use only “churchy” language.
- After a few minutes talking in this language, continue the discussion using only the familiar languages of your daily life settings.

Talk about the experience together.

- In one or two descriptive phrases, how would you characterize the two conversations?
- What evidences did you see of bridges between the two languages, or places where they could be “translated”?



Activity Two: A Visit to a World of a Participant

During this session or between sessions, you and the other *Connections* participants will be visiting a world of a group member. The purpose of the visit is to help you recognize ways in which God the Holy Spirit is present in this particular world.

1 As you tour the place where your host has invited you, ask:

- What are some of the problems in this world?
- What are some of the satisfactions?

2 Listen carefully as your host describes that world and what happens there. Reflect on these questions:

- What are some of the roles (stations) that the host fills here?
- What do you see as the host's calling?
- What "languages" are spoken here, including the language of faith?

3 Make the faith connections. Reflect on these questions:

- What is God doing here?
- What is the Spirit doing here? What was said, heard and felt in this visit to help you understand God better?
- What is being sanctified (made holy) here?
- Who is attempting to be holy here?

Experiencing Until Next Time

This week, look for examples of the Holy Spirit working in other people. As you check your news sources for stories, what examples of "holy behavior" or "holy language" do you notice? Look beyond the obvious heroic acts to quiet deeds and words.

How is the Spirit at work where there is:

- public confession
- emerging wisdom
- a new kind of unity
- surprising integrity
- a political rally

Who are the holy people around you:

- among your friends
- at work
- in the public spotlight
- on your web network
- at home
- at the supermarket

When you observe your world this week, ask yourself these questions:

- What words would I add to my description of "a holy person"?
- In what ways do I see myself as holy — as a part of the community of saints?

Read Romans 8:26-27 aloud.



Talk with another *Connections* participant about the language that is used in the version of the Bible you are reading. How have you experienced the Spirit interceding "with sighs too deep for words" (NRSV) or "in ways that cannot be put into words" (CEV)?

Prayer:

Use the words of the hymn "Gracious Spirit, Heed Our Pleading" (ELW 401) as a concluding prayer.

Using Other Resources

The amazing thing is the variety of people and ways that God chooses to nudge us along. Wherever our paths lead — whatever gifts we carry along — there is someone or something on the way, stepping out to stop us: Listen! Look! Think!

From *Thankful Stewards*, by Marj Leegard, page 13.

Connecting With Scriptures

The Holy Spirit's work is evident throughout the Bible, sometimes making surprising connections to daily living. Read or pray these passages as a way to recall what you have experienced this session and bring the Spirit's gifts into your own life.

Read John 9.

1 In what ways is God opening your eyes to see God — and God's work — more clearly?

2 How does the Holy Spirit use “earthy” things to make people holy?

though
I was
blind,
now I
see.

Read Romans 8.

1 What (in the world) does it mean to have the Spirit of God living in you?

2 “Flesh” in Paul's usage is the opposite of the “Spirit.” But didn't Jesus “put on” flesh for you? How does the Holy Spirit “sanctify” you as you walk around in a human body?

Read Psalm 77.

1 Without the work of the Holy Spirit you may not even think to reach out to God. Pray for the Spirit's work in your life.

2 When have you felt that God has forgotten you? How did the Spirit restore your faith?

Has God forgotten
to be gracious?

Session Six

Where in the World Is the Church?

The Communion of Saints The Third Article of the Apostles' Creed

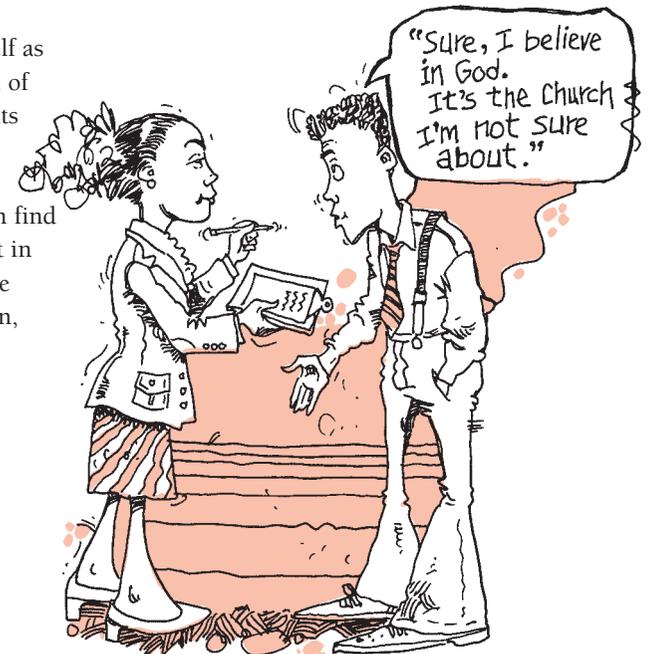
In this session, we continue to explore the Third Article of the creed: **believe in the Holy Spirit, one holy Christian church, the communion of the saints, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the flesh, and eternal life. Amen.**

Going to the Heart of the Matter

According to a number of national opinion polls, virtually all Americans say they believe in God. These statistics also reveal that many people are reluctant to commit themselves to a faith community, or at least have some trouble trusting the church “as an institution.”

Can faith and community exist apart? What is found or lost by having faith outside of the community of believers? How can the church break down barriers between itself as an institution and the faith of people inside and outside its membership?

In the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, we can find insight and encouragement in these matters, which can be summarized in the question, “Where in the world is the church?”

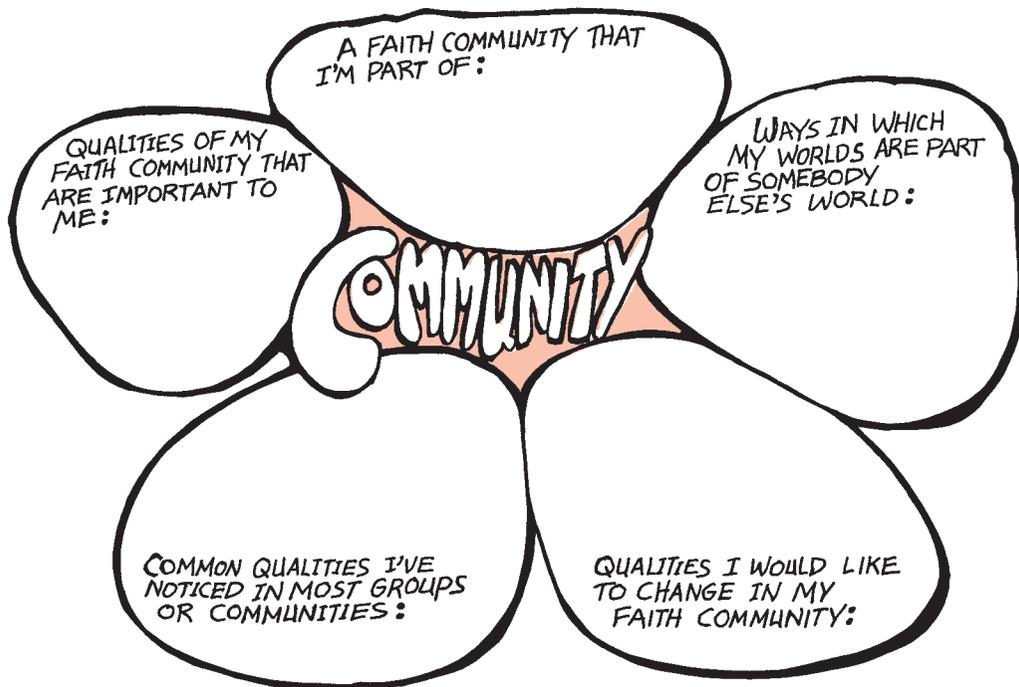


Beginning Where We Are

At the end of the previous session, you were invited to keep track of examples of holiness in the world around you.

- What examples did you see?
- Who in your community would you classify as holy — as a saint?
- In your opinion, what makes this person holy?
- What is the connection between this person and your congregation?

What are your thoughts about the following? Talk with another participant about your feelings.



Connecting With the Faith

The Third Article

I believe in the Holy Spirit, one holy Christian church, the community of the saints, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the flesh, and eternal life. Amen.

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my LORD or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as the Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers. On the Last Day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.

Large Catechism (Excerpt Summary)

The Creed calls the holy Christian church a “communion of saints.” The word *ecclesia* means “an assembly.” We are accustomed to the term “church,” by which we understand not a group of people but a consecrated house or building. But the house should not be called a church except for the single reason that the group of people assembles there.

I believe that there is on earth a little holy flock — or community — of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, yet is united in love without sect or

schism. Through it the Holy Spirit gathers us, using it to teach and preach the Word. By it the Holy Spirit creates and increases sanctification, causing the church daily to grow and become strong in the faith and the fruits of the Spirit.

Further, in this Christian church we have the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness is needed constantly. The Christian church is so ordered that we may daily obtain full forgiveness of sins through the word and through the sacraments appointed to comfort and revive our consciences as long as we live. God forgives us, and we forgive, bear with and aid one another.

All who seek to merit holiness through their works rather than

through the Gospel and the forgiveness of sins have expelled and separated themselves from the church.

This article must always remain in force. Creation is past and redemption is accomplished, but the Holy Spirit carries on God's work unceasingly until the last day. For this purpose God has appointed a community on earth, through which God speaks and does all God's work. God has not

God has not yet gathered together all Christian people, nor completed the granting of forgiveness.

yet gathered together all Christian people, nor completed the granting of forgiveness. Although

the whole world has sought painstakingly to learn what God is and thinks and does, yet it has never succeeded in the least. But here you have everything in richest measure. In these three articles God has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of God's heart — sheer, unutterable love. The Ten Commandments teach us what we ought to do; the Creed tells us what God does for us and gives to us. Through this knowledge we come to love and delight in all the commandments because God gives God's self completely to us, with all God's gifts and power to help us keep them. As long as we live we shall have enough to preach and learn on the subject of faith.

Reflection Questions

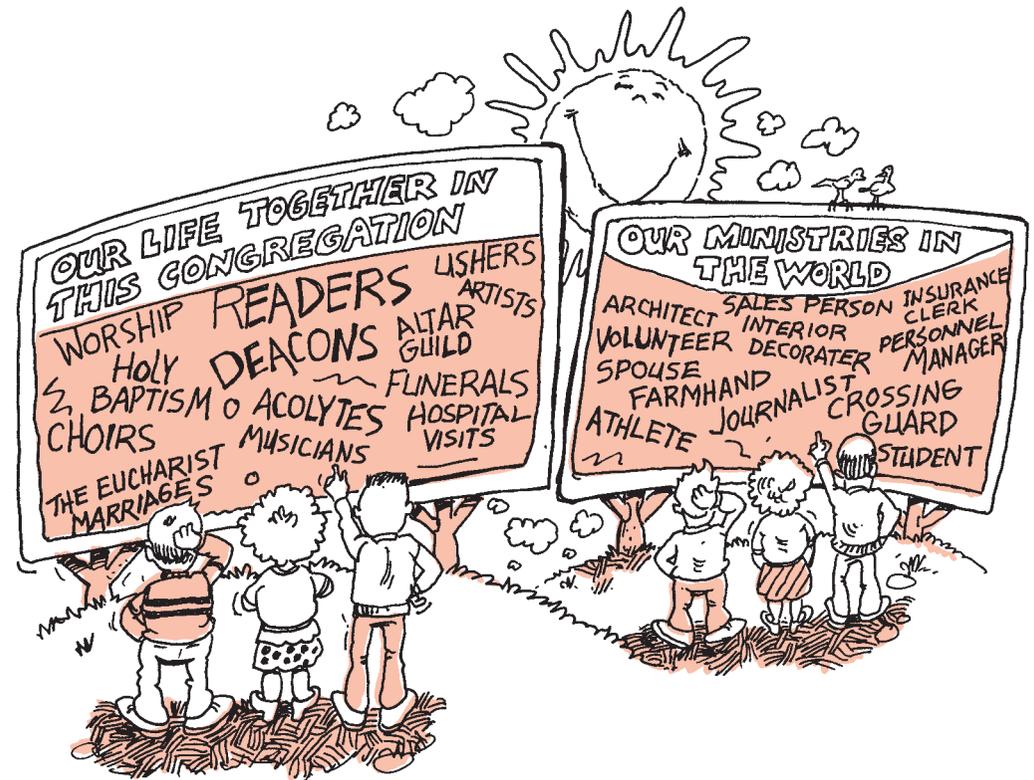
1 In what ways have you experienced the church as “a little holy flock” or “community of pure saints”?

2 How does God carry out God's work through your congregation? Through the broader church? Through you?

Connecting With *r* Daily Life **Activity One: Making Montages of Ministry**

In this activity, you and the other participants will make two montages about your congregation. The montages will show the congregation as a gathering and sending place.

- One half of the group will construct a montage of words that describe your congregation in terms of your life together in the congregation.
- The other half of the group will construct a montage of words that describe your congregation in terms of the ministries that members carry out in the world.
- After the montages are completed, decide how to use them. For example, you might use them in the narthex, on the congregation's webpage, or as a bulletin insert.



Activity Two: Paper Cup Church

The church is a gift to God's people. As one group of people matures in faith, another is growing into the church. Children, new believers and people from other places all inherit the church from those who have, in turn, been given that legacy by others. In this exercise you symbolize that activity by the passing of a simple paper cup.

- Seated in a circle, pass a paper cup from one person to the next. As you pass the cup from person to person, the only thing you can say is, "This cup represents the church."
- You may do with the paper cup what you wish, as though you were handing on the church to someone else, perhaps the next generation or a new set of leaders. For example, you might receive, hold, examine or otherwise react to the paper cup as a way of showing positive or negative emotion, changing the church, cherishing the gift and so forth.
- Watch and listen as the cup is passed around the circle. The behavior of other group members may help you know how to react when the cup comes to you.

After the cup has passed completely around the circle, talk about what you have experienced, what you saw and what you felt.



Experiencing Until Next Time

Connecting with the Congregation

Put an article in your church or synod newsletter or on their webpages about your *Connections* experience. Include quotations, examples and pictures to help others understand what *Connections* is all about. Include information about when the next unit of *Connections* will begin.

Share with a friend from the congregation some of your experiences thus far in *Connections*. Perhaps one or more members of the group can brainstorm with members of your congregation's outreach and education committees on ways another *Connections* unit could serve more broadly within the congregation and in the community.

Growing Together

This is the final session of this unit, "Living Confidently." Through many different experiences, you have seen through the Apostle's Creed how essential it is to be connected to:

- God the Creator
- God the Redeemer
- God the Spirit
- the church
- the world
- members of this group
- those around you

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-13, Ephesians 4:1-16 or Romans 12.

Talk with others about these questions:

- What do these passages tell you about the Holy Spirit, about the faith community and about this group?
- What are some specific ways in which you can connect your faith to some of the stations in your life?

As an option, construct prayer petitions that include your gratitude to God for the members of this group. Include those petitions as you pray the following prayer in a circle with joined hands.

Say this prayer together:

O God, we thank you that you act through your people for the good of the world. (Insert petitions.) Strengthen your church for its life in the many worlds you make for its members. In Christ we pray. Amen

These familiar sections of Scripture may hold some surprises for you, especially when you read or pray them with the Holy Spirit's work in your worlds in mind.

Read John 10.

1 How is Jesus like a shepherd to you? How do you know his voice calling you?

2 How can the church be one flock with one shepherd?

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Read Romans 9 and 12.

1 Paul says he would cut himself off from Christ for the sake of Christ's people. What does this mean to you?

2 How does the Holy Spirit transform and renew you to live in harmony with others, even while you continue to be different from them?

We, who are many, are one body in Christ.

Read Psalm 100.

1 Meditate on God's steadfast love and covenant faithfulness. Remember communities of faith where you have worshiped. Pray for them.

2 When have you experienced the Spirit gathering God's people simply to rejoice and enjoy God together?

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

Using Other Resources

The external disciplines of social custom, manners, subtle pressures are being removed. More and more people crowd the world; their lives interact; they sit at home and are still bombarded by many kinds of signals and value systems. The church cannot be or cannot remain a nursery, a greenhouse, a sheltering and protecting agency. The church is thrown upon the inner disciplines of people who, having come to faith, want to conform their lives to the church's Head, Jesus Christ.

From *The Hidden Discipline*, by Martin Marty, pages 56-57.

Connections: Faith and Life

Unit Two

Living Confidently

The Apostles' Creed

Participant Resource

Authors

Norma Cook Everist

Nelvin Vos

Editorial Team

Bob Sitze

Christine E. Weiser

Carol Weiser

Advisory Team

Norma Cook Everist

Sally Simmel

Bob Sitze

Nelvin Vos

Carol Weiser

Design

Kathryn Brewer

Illustration

Joe van Severen

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Session One

What in the World Is God Doing?

God the Creator and Preserver The First Article of the Apostles' Creed

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Recognize that God is working in the world at all times and in all places.
- Understand the relationship among Creator, creation and creature.
- Appreciate the greatness of God and God's creation.
- Wonder about God's power and the forces of the created world
- Discover how their beliefs about God affect their daily lives.
- Articulate how God is working in their lives.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.

This section provides an opportunity for group members to become better acquainted with each other. Since the lives of the other participants and you are the basis for *Connections*, time spent on getting acquainted in this first session is very important.

Have participants pair with persons they know less well. Ask members of the pairs to talk with each other about themselves, using the questions in the participant resource.

If you have been through Unit One of *Connections* and the group members are the same, you may wish to shorten this activity. However, do not eliminate it altogether since it is important that group members become reacquainted with each other. Also, if there are any new people in the group, it will be important for them to be introduced to others and to *Connections*.

Give the pairs about 5 minutes to talk with each other.

Ask the pairs to rejoin the group. Have each person introduce his or her partner. These introductions should include the other person's name and a brief description of that person. Allow about one minute for each introduction.

Beginning Where We Are

We usually ask how the three articles of the Creed apply to our daily lives. In this session we begin from the other direction by remembering particular times in our everyday lives and thinking about what the Triune God is doing there. Use the chart in the participant resource and ask the questions one at a time, “Where were you on Tuesday at 2:00 in the afternoon?” and so on. At first people may believe that they cannot remember, but with a moment to think, they usually can. In responding to the third question for each time period, “What was God doing there?” participants may at first think they need to use formal terms for God. Encourage people to use their own words, such as, “God was agonizing with me in my anxiety.”

When talking in pairs, they may want to focus on one or two that seemed the most significant. However, remind them that in conversation with their partner they may discover that the most ordinary has the most thought-provoking questions about the nature of God.

While they are talking with each other, write at the head of three columns on a board or newsprint these titles: CREATING–SUSTAINING, REDEEMING–LIBERATING, MAKING HOLY–MAKING US ONE. Invite the group back together and have some share their responses to the last question, “What was God doing there?”

Listen to their expressions of the activity of the Triune God in their own words. As you hear what they are saying, roughly place a summarizing phrase in one of the three columns. For example, an “agonizing God” might go in column two, the Second Article of the Creed, the work of Christ who agonizingly suffered for our redemption. The experience of a God who was “creating community” might go under the Third Article and thinking about God providing and protecting would go under the First Article.

Questions about the nature of God may arise naturally. Is God a God of judgment? In what way? When? Why or why not? Are their times that God is with us in our enjoyment? Do we have a God who laughs? How do our experiences and beliefs about God vary through the week? Were there some surprises? The goal is not necessarily to fill the three columns, but to see how our experiences and beliefs about God in the language of our everyday lives do relate to the Triune God of the three articles of the Creed. These conversations, beginning where we are, can shape the group’s conversation in this session and through the entire unit.

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating.

The Small Catechism section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.

Ask participants to jot down brief responses to the questions at the beginning of this section in the participant resource. Note that this is for their reflection only. Give them about two minutes for this work.

Connecting With the Faith



A Mind's-Eye Journey

Invite participants to sit back, close their eyes, and listen quietly as you lead them through a guided imagery experience. During this activity, read each sentence slowly, pausing briefly after each. Allow more time between paragraphs. While the time may seem long to you as you are reading, it will seem shorter to participants. The reading should take about 10 minutes.

Begin reading slowly:

Close your eyes. Settle yourself comfortably in your chair. Relax. Free your mind from all thoughts and concerns. Erase everything from your mind.

Now imagine yourself sitting or standing in a place where you spend a great deal of your time. This may be your workplace, your home or your neighborhood. You are very familiar with this place. You know everything about it — what it looks like, who is here, who comes and goes, what is made here.

Picture the place. Look around the place. What does it look like? What furniture or objects are here? What is beneath your feet? Picture everything in the place. Notice where everything is located. Notice colors and textures. Let your mind picture this place completely and vividly.

Now think about who is in this place. Whom do you see around you? Who is here when you are here? Who is here when you are not here? Who comes occasionally?

What are these people doing in this place? What is your relationship to these people? How do you feel about each of them? What do you say to each other?

What happens in this place? What is made or unmade here? What happens as a result of what takes place here?

Pause for a full minute, then continue reading:

Now think about all that is good about this place. What do you like about it? What is positive here? What gives you good feelings? Who makes you feel affirmed?

What or who is not good in this place? What is sad? What is incomplete? What hurts you? What hurts others? What might you call evil about the place? What would you change?

Pause again, then say:

Quietly leave your place now and rejoin our group here. Slowly open your eyes again to the people around you here.

Allow participants to remain silent for a few seconds after opening their eyes. Tell them that they will be talking about their thoughts in a few minutes.

Have the group say together the first article of the Creed. Ask someone to read out loud again Luther's Explanation from *The Small Catechism*.

Have participants form pairs and talk about the questions in the participant resource illustration. They might begin by describing (very briefly) the place they imagined. Suggest that they choose one or two questions to talk about in depth.



Tell participants that this section in their participant resource will suggest activities and questions for them to consider between sessions. Note the suggestions on how to explore another part of the world during the next week.



Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session. The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John's Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use "Connecting with Scriptures."

Session Two

Is Anywhere Safe Anymore?

God the Protector and Defender The First Article of the Apostles' Creed

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Know God the Creator as both Protector and Defender.
- Recognize ways in which God works in a fallen world.
- Appreciate God's ongoing work of caring for creation.
- Identify their fears about violence and evil at large in our world.
- Grow in trust that God is in control.
- Engage in activity that helps protect, sustain and preserve creation.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.

Beginning Where We Are

Each time participants come back together they will have much to share, both from the reflection questions and tasks in the previous session's segment "Experiencing Until Next Time," and from other things that occurred during their week. "Beginning Where We Are" is a gathering time during which they may reconnect and focus on this session.

Ask participants to read this section in the participant resource and talk with another person about the questions there.

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating. *The Small Catechism* section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.

Connecting With the Faith



Raise again the issue identified when participants arrived: “Why do bad things happen to good people?” To help focus the discussion, ask participants to think of a recent event or experience that happened locally that might fit the “bad things—good people” category. What were the circumstances? What was the outcome, if any? How do they believe God was at work in this particular event?

Be alert for pat answers, such as, “It was God’s will,” or, “God wanted this child in Heaven,” or, “God always has a good reason, we just don’t always know what it is.” Encourage participants to look at the deeper issues.

Activity One: Taking Another Mind’s-Eye Journey

Invite participants to sit back, relax and listen carefully to your words, letting their imaginations roam freely. Slowly begin reading:

Close your eyes, relax and free your mind of all thoughts. We will return briefly to the mind’s-eye place in which we were last session. Remember, you were thinking about a place you know well. You imagined what it looks like, who is there, who comes and goes, what changes happen, what is made there. Return to that place in your thoughts now.

Pause for at least 30 seconds so that people can return to their imagined place.

When you were in this place before, you thought about all that is good and all that is bad there. Today you are thinking again about the joys and the problems of the place. But you are also thinking about everything that is there: the air you breathe, the lighting, the sounds you hear, the smells, the textures, the feeling on your skin — everything.

Suddenly, something is happening. Imagine that God has stopped thinking about that place. God has stopped creating in that place.

What do you see happening? What does the place look like? What is still there? What is gone? What is different? Have the lights gone out, or are they still on? Are you still there? Or have you disappeared? Is anyone there, or has everyone disappeared? Are the bad things getting worse? Or has everything disappeared?

Think about it for a minute. Please keep your eyes closed for a few moments.

After a full minute of silence, invite participants back to the present, saying quietly, “Now gradually start coming back. Come back to the world God is creating for us in this room at this moment.” Remain quiet a few seconds until all have rejoined the group.

Invite participants to describe the mind’s-eye world they saw. What happened to the place when God stopped thinking about it? Give participants sev-

eral minutes to describe their experience. As they talk, be aware of whether they describe the place as slipping back into nothing if God did not act, or moving into a state of greater evil.

Notice in the participants’ imagined places whether the world suddenly becomes totally evil or whether it disappears altogether. Both views have an element of truth, because God is redeeming the world from evil at the same time as God continues creative and redemptive work. This activity helps participants distinguish between God’s work of creation and redemption. It also gives them personal insight about their own deepest fears as they struggle with reliance on God.

Activity Two: Hearing a Creation Story Backwards

Ask participants to relax, close their eyes again and follow in their minds as you read a story. Tell them that you will be reading the creation story from the first chapter of Genesis backwards so that they can see how the creation would look if God were withdrawing.

Slowly read the following:

Return again to the place you imagined. It is now back to the way it was when you first imagined it. Listen and picture this in your mind:

Then God no longer said, “Let us make humans in our image, after our likeness,” and humans were not made.

And God no longer said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures,” and the creatures were not made.

And God no longer said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures.” And there were no longer fish in the sea or birds flying.

And God no longer said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens,” and there was no sun, no moon no stars.

And God no longer gathered the waters together to be seas, or the land to be land.

And God no longer said, “Let there be light.”

And the Spirit of God no longer moved over the face of the waters. And there was no darkness. There was no form, no void, no earth. God was not creating the heavens and the earth. There was no beginning.

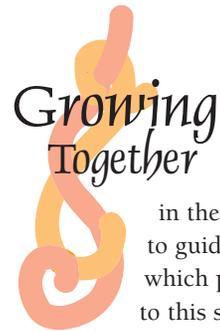
Again, give participants a full minute to reflect on this scene, then ask them to open their eyes and rejoin the group. Invite them to describe the impressions they had during the reading, using questions in the participant resource as a guide.



Experiencing Until Next Time

Ask participants to read this section in the participant resource and note the suggestion for an activity to do before the next session. Distribute paper and ask participants to summarize their most-likely schedule for the next week. Invite them to consider the challenge in this activity, to note one place in this schedule where they might be working to protect, sustain or preserve creation through their work, leisure, relationships or influence. The questions in the *Connections* resource help focus their thoughts.

With the participants, plan for the visit that will take place as part of the third session. Arrange for a time, if other than the regular meeting time, and other details. Invite the host to say a few words about the place to be visited and his or her role there.



Growing Together

Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session. The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Connecting With Scriptures

Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John's Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use "Connecting with Scriptures."

Session Three

Who Is This Jesus to You?

Jesus the Christ The Second Article of the Apostles' Creed

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Explore who Jesus is.
- Understand how the names and actions of Jesus Christ reveal his purpose.
- Appreciate the fullness and the richness of the Incarnation.
- Feel the presence of Christ in their lives.
- Notice the ways Christ is present in the worlds in which they live.
- Develop further skills in connecting faith and world.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.

Beginning Where We Are

When all participants have arrived, invite them to tell about carrying out their plan from the last session. What had they planned to do? Were they able to carry out their plan? If not, what got in the way? How might you connect with a group that is working on local and global issues to preserve and sustain the earth?

This session focuses on Jesus the Christ. To introduce this topic, write JESUS at the top of the posterboard, whiteboard or newsprint. Then ask participants to call out names they think of for Jesus. (Some are mentioned in the opening paragraphs of the participant resource.) Invite them to say what each name reveals about Jesus. What adjectives or characteristics would they use? List these words as well.

Turn to the “Beginning Where We Are” section of the participant resource. Ask participants to form pairs and discuss the questions in that section. Give the pairs about 10 minutes for this, then in the total group invite several people to talk about their conversations.

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating. *The Small Catechism* section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.

Connecting With the Faith

A graphic with the text "Connecting With Daily Life" in a stylized font. The text is white and black, set against a background of orange and purple shapes that resemble a stylized 'C' or a swirl.

Three activities are suggested for this part of the session. One of these is a visit. If the visit is scheduled for another time, use the first two activities below. Plan to do those at the visit site before taking the tour.

You may also want to augment the session with a Bible study using the material in "Connecting With Scriptures" from Session One or Session Two.

Activity One: Who Is Jesus to You?

This activity focuses on the relationships between childhood and adult understandings of Jesus. Refer participants to this section of their *Connections* resource.

Provide drawing paper and markers or lumps of modeling clay or playdough. Allow five minutes to draw or mold the childhood figure. Then participants should share what they have made.

After a few minutes of sharing, repeat the activity from an adult perspective. Again, discussion and sharing follow using the questions at the end of this section in the participant resource.

Discuss (in pairs or small groups) who they consider Jesus to be and how their image of Jesus has changed from their childhood. Use the questions in the participant resource as a guide.

Activity Two: Taking a Different Perspective of Jesus

The instructions for this activity are in the participant resource. You may want to have Bibles and Bible dictionaries available to help participants learn more about biblical persons close to Jesus.

Activity Three: A Visit to a World of a Participant

A "world" and "faith" visit is a new kind of experience for many people. You and the participants may struggle to find ways of joining faith words to the secular words that come naturally in the "world" setting. That struggle is important to the process of making connection between faith and life.

If the discussion drifts to the visited world's interesting features, keep asking, "How is God a part of that feature?" Notice the importance of everything they say, but also work at making the faith connections.

The end result of the visit is not just learning how faith connects in general with a person's daily world. It is also learning how the visit's host connects the faith with this particular world. Participants will learn things about the visited world that will help them appreciate the host in a different way. Invite them to express these observations.

For other elements of a successful visit, see further directions about visits in the Unit One Leader's Guide.

A graphic with the text "Experiencing Until Next Time" in a stylized font. The text is white and black, set against a background of a purple star shape.

Keeping a journal is an activity that some people find easy and enjoyable. The suggestion of keeping a journal until the next session should be presented as broadly as possible. Note that this may be in the form of an actual journal, or as simple as two or three sentences or phrases written on Post-It Notes™ that describe how participants' faith in Christ affected their perceptions and decisions. Some may journal best by posting on their blog or Facebook page. The purpose of this activity is to help participants reflect on their daily experiences.

A graphic with the text "Growing Together" in a stylized font. The text is white and black, set against a background of orange and purple shapes that resemble a stylized 'G' or a swirl.

Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session. The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.

A graphic with the text "Connecting With Scriptures" in a stylized font. The text is white and black, set against a background of orange and purple shapes that resemble a stylized 'C' or a swirl.

Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John's Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use "Connecting with Scriptures."

Session Four

How Can We Live in a Death-Defying Culture?

From Death to Life The Second Article of the Apostles' Creed

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Recognize the ways death affects the goodness of creation.
- See connections between redemption and their stations and vocations.
- Share their feelings about beginnings and endings.
- Acknowledge common fears of death.
- Witness through their vocation to Christ's redeeming work.
- Speak to one another of the hope they have in Christ in facing death.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.

Beginning Where We Are

Invite participants to talk about the happenings and events in their lives since the last session. Focus on this session by using the questions at the top of the page in the participant resource.

Move on to the questions about new beginnings and endings they foresee. Suggest that they talk about some of the matters in this section in pairs or groups of three or four.

Participants are generally more comfortable sharing personally in a smaller group. They also have more opportunities to talk when fewer are in the group. While pairs are most often suggested for in-depth discussions about the issues and questions, you may want to divide into groups of four. By now participants should know and trust each other enough to feel comfortable in a group of that size, and it will offer a broader range of conversation.

Invite participants to share with the total group summaries of their conversations. What changes excite them? What changes frighten them? Allow ample time for this conversation.

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating. *The Small Catechism* section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.

Connecting With the Faith



Talking About Grief Experiences

Ask participants to think of someone close to them who died. The death does not have to be recent, but it should be the death of someone significant. Direct them to take two or three minutes to jot down notes in response to the questions.

Invite participants to talk with another person (or in groups of three or four) about their responses. Give them at least 10 minutes for this conversation, then ask the pairs or groups to talk briefly about this question: “What helps you face death — both your own and that of others dear to you?”

After an additional minute or two, call the group together and talk about the last question in this set. Encourage participants to express their feelings and their faith.

Thinking About Stations and Vocations

Prepare the posterboard, whiteboard or newsprint:

1. **At the top of the left-hand column, write STATIONS.**
2. **Write VOCATION at the top of a right-hand column.**
3. **In the center, between the two column headings, write the word CALLING.**
4. **At the top center of the chart, as a title, write the word REDEEMING.**

Using the material in the participant resource as a guide, talk about the concepts of stations and vocations. First ask participants to name some of the roles or stations they fill. List these in the left column. Next, invite participants to think of their vocation in the roles (stations) they listed. Write these below VOCATION. Note that all Christians are called in their Baptism to live out their vocation in whatever station they find themselves.

Engage the pairs or small groups in working through the chart in their participant resources. Ask participants to think about how the forgiveness of sins frees them from mere self-fulfillment for a vocation of serving others. For example, in which station(s) might they be involved in God’s action to move someone from the “death” of alienation to the “new life” of community?

After a period of time, invite individual participants to share their thoughts with the whole group, making sure that the problem (for example, alienation) is well-understood before describing how Christ worked through them as agents of God’s redeeming grace (for example, community) to a person or situation.

Be careful not to imply that everything in our stations is bad, or that creation is evil. Rather, in each of our stations the problems of the human condition of sin will be manifest. Participants know this only too well. This activity here is an opportunity to talk about the human predicaments which they experience in their lives and freedom for new life in Christ.

More on the topic of stations and vocations is found in Unit One, Session Three.



The participant resource suggests that participants rent a film that deals with the subjects of death, faith and hope. The films suggested in the introductory material for *Connections* are excellent for this particular activity. You or participants may know of others.



Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session. The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John’s Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use “Connecting with Scriptures.”

Session Five

What Makes Us Holy?

The Breath of the Spirit The Third Article of the Apostles' Creed

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Understand the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives.
- Integrate the meanings of holiness into their daily lives.
- Notice ways the Holy Spirit surprises them.
- Become sensitive to the gentle power of the Holy Spirit.
- Encourage one another to live lives filled with the Holy Spirit.
- Be able to bridge the language of faith and the languages of daily life.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.

Beginning Where We Are

Introduce the subject of “holy” from the list in the framed area in the participant resource. Note the questions in the participant resource that ask about “holy characters” in the film that participants watched during the week.

Help participants see that Christians are both saint and sinner simultaneously. Ask participants how they experience both in their lives.

Ask participants to describe some characteristics of “holy” people. These might be characteristics of people on the list or characteristics they think of when they hear that a person is “holy.”

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating.

The Small Catechism section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.

Connecting With the Faith



Connecting With Daily Life

Two activities are suggested for this part of the session. One of these is a visit. If you plan to go on the visit during your usual meeting period, you may have time only for the opening activities in this session.

If time is short, you can adapt “The Languages of Faith” activity to become part of the visit by noting this section of the participant resource, referring to the languages implied in the illustration and the questions following this segment.

Activity One: The Languages of Faith

When we witness to Christ, we need to speak so that others understand. At Pentecost (Acts 2) the Spirit empowered the disciples to speak in the languages of those gathered in Jerusalem. Martin Luther translated the Bible into the vernacular. Likewise, we need to communicate with people in the language of their everyday life.

Activity Two: A Visit to a World of a Participant

If you will be conducting a visit, follow the suggestions in the participant resource for this visit. Review with participants the purpose of the visits (see Unit Two, Session Three, in the Leader Guide.) Two standard sets of questions (Nos. 1 and 2) are followed by a set of questions (No. 3) that get at the question of the Holy Spirit’s work in this place.



Experiencing Until Next Time

Review participants’ understanding of a holy person. Look together at the suggestions for the variety of places and events in which to find these individuals and notice their behaviors and attitudes. Recommend that participants jot down notes about people whom they recognized as holy but who probably would not be considered holy by usual standards of society. Remind the group that it is the Holy Spirit who makes all of us holy through the communion of saints in bringing us to faith in Christ.



Growing Together

Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session. The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Connecting With Scriptures

Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John’s Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use “Connecting with Scriptures.”

Session Six

Where in the World is the Church?

The Communion of Saints The Third Article of the Apostles' Creed

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Recognize that being part of a community is what is needed to be a believer.
- See how the church works as a community of faith to connect members.
- Enjoy and appreciate what the church means.
- Appreciate the need for the forgiveness of sins in the church.
- Observe the church as a strong resource for its members.
- Take specific steps to assist the congregation to support more fully its members in their daily lives.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.

Beginning Where We Are

Invite participants to tell about examples of holiness and holy people they observed in the past week. In their opinion, what made these people holy? What characteristics of holiness do they see in themselves?

Participants may find it difficult to see holiness in themselves. Encourage them to name at least one example, or suggest that you will come back to this matter later in the session.

Turn to the vector diagram in the section “Beginning Where We Are” in the participant resource. Give participants a few moments to jot notes in response to any of the matters presented in the diagram. On posterboard, whiteboard or newsprint write *COMMUNITY*. Ask participants to share any of their responses to any of the portions of the diagram. Record their responses as they share them, without comment. Then engage the group in conversation about the work of the Spirit in faith communities.

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating. *The Small Catechism* section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.

Connecting With the Faith



Activity One: Making Montages of Ministry

Divide the group into two smaller groups. Give each small group several colored markers, old magazines or newspapers, scissors, glue and a large sheet of newsprint or shelf paper (paper tablecloths also work well). Briefly go over the instructions in the participant resource with the groups, then assign one montage to each group.

To help the groups with the task, provide the first group with resources such as congregational web site, newsletter, annual report, and other materials that will remind participants of the many activities in and of the congregation. Be certain that they include activities that take place outside the church building but on behalf of the congregation, such as participation in the local food bank or ecumenical gatherings.

The second group might use the congregation directory, “time and talent” sheets and other resources to remind participants of the occupations or daily activities of members. Be sure the group includes members’ involvement in synod and churchwide functions as well as other volunteer activities.

Encourage participants not to forget the participation of congregation members who are young and old, who work without pay, who are retired or who are unemployed. This will stretch the value of the activity beyond quickly-recalled activities and features of congregational

and individual lives.

Post the finished montages where all can see them. Ask someone from each group to describe the group’s montage briefly. Invite participants from the other group to comment and to suggest activities that may have been overlooked. As a total group, talk about ways to use the montages to make other members aware of the variety of ministries through which the congregation is the church in the world.

Look at the montages again. As a group, discuss ways in which the congregation recognizes, equips and supports the members in ministry. Use the following questions as a guide:

- **How do our congregation’s programs — education, family, youth and stewardship — support people in their work and other activity in the world?**
- **In what ways do formal and informal groups in our congregation — womens, mens, youth, singles, couples, Bible study and small groups — help members connect faith and daily life?**
- **What opportunities are provided for congregational members and professional staff to visit members in their work worlds?**
- **How does our staff and congregation support one another in mutual ministry?**
- **How does our congregational web site and newsletter highlight the ministry of the members in the world as well as in the church?**

Activity Two: Paper Cup Church

Follow the directions in the participant resource to engage in this group experience. Although it seems simple, the experience has the potential for being quite powerful, especially if this group has been together for awhile.

Allow ample time for follow-up reactions by participants. They might talk about how they felt when they received the cup or passed it on. They might share how what at first seemed meaningless suddenly took on deeply symbolic value.



The activities suggested in this section of the participant resource provide a way for *Connections* participants to share their experiences with other members of the congregation. As you continue with the next *Connections* unit, this may draw new members to the group. Be open to them. Or, it may spark the formation of a new *Connections* group. Think of people and places for such a group and help facilitate its formation.



Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session. The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John’s Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use “Connecting with Scriptures.”



Living Spiritually

Participant Resource

*Norma Cook Everist
Nelvin Vos*



Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Unit Three
The Lord's Prayer

Unit Three

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General Introduction

Where is God, anyway? And what exactly is God doing?

Many of us as children probably thought that God was located about three feet above the altar or in some other spot in the church building. The writer of Psalm 139 discovered that God was everywhere. “If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me” (verses 9-10).

By taking part in a *Connections* group, you have also begun a process of discovery. *Connections* is about discovery: of God, of God's worlds and of God's people.

Connections: Faith and Life unfolds the many worlds God is creating and redeeming. It is a discovery of God at work in the world, especially in your life and in the lives of others who participate. There's a saying that you don't really know people until you have visited them where they live. In your *Connections* group, you will actually visit members of the group in their homes, in their places of work, in the neighborhoods in which they live or in their places of leisure or recreation. You will see people in new ways as you see how they live and relate to others in the worlds God is creating and redeeming for them.

Through *Connections*, you will get to know yourself better and begin to recognize and understand how your life is a ministry. You will also come to a fresh and better understanding of the faith as you observe how it relates to your occupation, your place of recreation, your community and your home. The familiar words of the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed and the sacraments will be explored as they relate to your everyday world. The Ten Commandments will be studied and applied to the decisions you make and to the life-and-death issues you face.

And you will get to know Martin Luther better. As you study *The Large Catechism* and discuss it in the worlds you visit, you will observe how he dealt with his worlds when he came face to face with God. You will recognize that his world is very different from yours today, and yet the core issues remain the same.

Unit Three
Living Spiritually
The Lord's Prayer



About This Book

This participant resource contains questions, highlights from Luther's writings, session references and notes. It is not a textbook as such, but rather a collection of readings and learning activities with some space for your writings and reflections. The participant resource is where you can think about and record your experiences. In addition to containing the session material, the participant resource is a private place where you can insert anything you wish, in effect creating your own resource.

So let the discovery begin – the discovery of God, of God's worlds and of yourself in growth and prayer.

Introduction

Connections is about the relationship between faith and life. The real curriculum for this experience is life: your life and the lives of others in the group. *Connections* focuses on your day-to-day experiences: your joys, concerns, activities and issues. The purpose is to help you and other participants notice the worlds God is creating, saving and making holy all around you.

If daily life is the curriculum for *Connections*, then one way to describe daily life is to think of it as continual prayer. In this unit you will study the Lord's Prayer as an exemplary prayer, one as full of meaning for your life as it was for Martin Luther's. Prayer was an essential element of Luther's daily life. So important, in fact, that he engaged in prayer several times each day.

In his Introduction to the Lord's Prayer, and in typically straightforward language, Luther writes about prayer:

It is very necessary to exhort and draw the people to prayer, as Christ and the apostles also did. Let no one think that it makes no difference whether I pray or not, as vulgar people do who say in their delusion, "Why should I pray? Who knows whether God heeds my prayer or cares to hear it? If I do not pray, someone else will." Thus they fall into the habit of never praying.

It is quite true that the kind of babbling and bellowing that used to pass for prayers in the church was not really prayer. To stake prayer on luck and to mumble aimlessly is worthless. We allow ourselves to be hindered and deterred by such thoughts as these: "I am not holy enough or worthy enough." Away with such thoughts! God does not regard prayer on account of the person, but on account of the Word. Nor will God allow our prayers to be frustrated or lost, for if God did not intend to answer you, God would not have told you to pray.

The theme of Unit Three is "Living Spiritually." During the six sessions of this unit you will spend time in each of the seven petitions of

the Lord's Prayer, its Introduction and closing Doxology. You will engage in activities like reading and discussing, imagining, personal sharing and writing. You will participate in at least one off-site visit — a chance to see the daily worlds of members of your group. Above all, you will take a measure of your own spiritual life and rejoice with members of your group in the gift of prayer. However and whenever you pray, you will appreciate Luther's explanation of prayer as you work your way through this unit.

And in all these activities you will meet God, working alongside you in the worlds you inhabit. In prayer you will find God there with you, and draw strength from the knowledge that God stays with you throughout each day.

Unit Three Living Spiritually The Lord's Prayer



Session One

To Pray Is to Act

Prayer and Spirituality The Introduction and the First Petition of the Lord's Prayer

Going to the
Heart
of the Matter

This unit will focus on the Lord's Prayer and its relation to your spiritual growth. In this session, we explore the Introduction and the First Petition:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.**

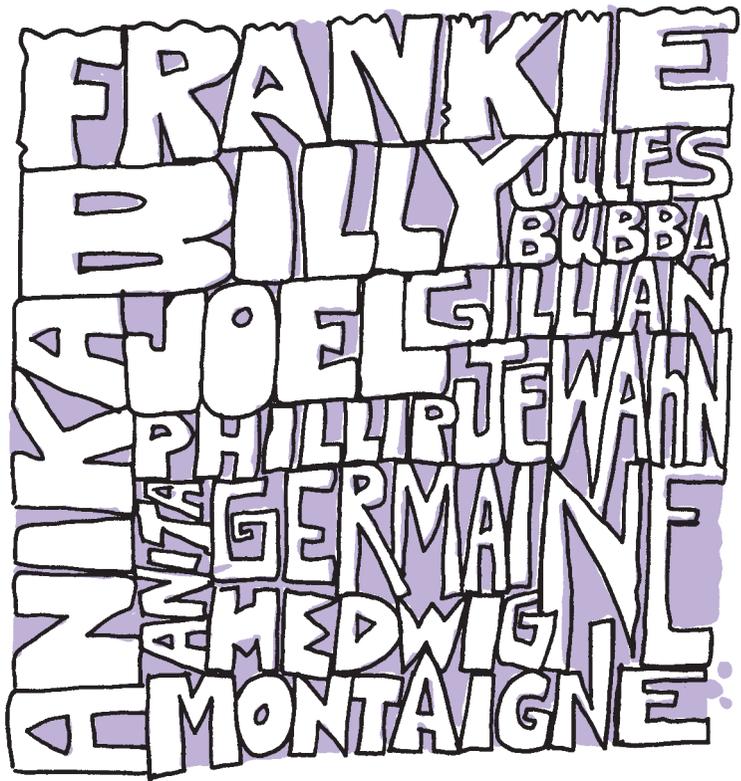
Human beings are inescapably spiritual. Contemporary polls consistently report that a high percentage of all North Americans say they pray — including even those who say they are atheists or agnostics! Why is it, do you think, that so many people pray? Given these reasons, why is it that some Christians still find it hard to pray? Perhaps it is a matter of knowing the skills of praying. Perhaps some Christians are locked into formalized understandings of prayer. Or perhaps even the very awesomeness of God gives some Christians the false view that God is somehow unapproachable because of their sinfulness or ordinariness.

In this session you begin to answer the question, “What role does prayer take in my life?” by addressing the matter of God's holy name.

Getting Acquainted

Choose as a partner someone in the group whom you would like to know better. Spend a few minutes talking about the following:

- What is your middle name?
- How did you get this name?
- When, if ever, do you use this name?
- How does this name describe you?



Spend about five minutes talking about these questions. Then rejoin the group and introduce your partner, telling a bit about the other person's full name. Discuss this question: Why are names important?

Beginning Where We Are

Each of us is a spiritual person, and each of us is a real person. The two ideas fit together:

- We have been created to live in the world as real human beings with real flesh and blood.
- We have been created in the image of God, baptized into Jesus Christ and filled with God's Holy Spirit.

So we are real, and, at the same time, we are Spirit-filled and Spirit-led. Each of us is spiritual in a slightly different way, however. Look at the definitions of spirituality below. Place a check mark next to the one that most closely fits your understanding of your own spirituality.

Spirituality is most like:

- Seeking God's will
- Seeing Jesus as a model for a godly life
- Having a personal relationship with God
- Living a life of service

Go to different corners (or places) in the room according to which of the four choices you selected. Talk to other participants who have made the same choice as yourself, discussing matters such as these:

- Why did you choose a particular definition?
- What difficulties did you have in making a choice?
- How have you lived out this understanding of spirituality in your life?

For the larger group, summarize what your choice-group shared. Listen to the other groups' thoughts about spirituality to find similarities and differences with your own thoughts.

The Introduction
Our Father in heaven,

Small Catechism

What does this mean?
With these words God wants to entice us, so that we come to believe he is truly our Father and we are truly his children, in order that we may ask him boldly and with complete confidence, just as loving children ask their loving father.

Large Catechism
(Excerpt Summary)

We have heard what we are to do and believe. Now follows the third part, how we are to pray. Nothing is so necessary as to call upon God incessantly and drum into God's ears our prayer that God may give, preserve and increase in us faith.

To pray is to call upon God in every need. By invocation and prayer the name of God is glorified and used to good purpose.

Indeed, the human heart is by nature so desparately wicked that it always flees from God, thinking

that God neither wants nor cares for our prayers because we are sinners. God will not cast us out or drive us away, even though we are sinners. God does not regard prayer on account of the person, but on account of the Word.

Furthermore, God takes the initiative and puts into our mouths the very words we are to use. Each of us should form the habit to pray daily. In the seven successive articles or petitions are comprehended all the needs that continually beset us, each one so great that it should impel us to keep praying for it all our lives.

Reflection Questions

1 How and when have you experienced the phenomenon of "God putting into our mouths the very words we are to use"?

2 How does it strike you that you can "call upon God incessantly and drum into God's ears" your prayers for faith?

The First Petition
Hallowed be your name.

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

It is true that God's name is holy in itself, but we ask in this prayer that it may also become holy in and among us.

How does this come about?

Whenever the Word of God is taught clearly and purely and we, as God's children, also live holy lives according to it. To this end help us, dear Father in heaven! However, whoever teaches and lives otherwise than the Word of God teaches profanes the name of God among us. Preserve us from this, heavenly Father!

Large Catechism
(Excerpt Summary)

This is rather obscure. What is it to pray that God's name may become holy? Is it not holy already? Yes, but not our use of it. God's name was given to us when we became Christians at Baptism, through which God so incorporates us with God that all that is God's must serve for our use.

God's name is the greatest treasure and most sacred thing we have. How does it become holy among us? The plainest answer is: when both our teaching and our life are godly and Christian.

The name of God is profaned by us either in words or deeds; everything we do on earth may be classified as word or deed, speech or act. It is profaned when people preach, teach and speak in God's name anything that is false and deceptive, using God's name to cloak lies and make them acceptable. Likewise, when people grossly misuse the divine name as a cloak for their shame, by swearing, cursing, conjuring, etc. It is



also profaned by an openly evil life and wicked works, when those who are called Christians and God's people are adulterers, drunkards, gluttons, jealous persons, and slanderers.

God's name was given to us when we became Christians at Baptism.

God's name is the greatest treasure and most sacred thing we have.

God's name is dishonored if we who are called by it and enjoy God's manifold blessings fail to teach, speak and live as godly people. "To hallow" (make holy) means the same as "to praise, extol, and honor" in word and deed.

See, then, what a great need there is for this kind of prayer in the world. Likewise, this petition is for ourselves who have the Word of God but are ungrateful for it and fail to live according to it. There is nothing God would rather hear than to have God's glory and praise exalted above everything else and God's Word taugth in its purity and cherished and treasured.

Reflection Questions

1 In what ways have you experienced God's name being profaned and blasphemed? How does such use of God's name affect you?

2 How do you hallow God's name? Why do you need to pray that this would happen?

3 As a Christian you wear Christ's name. What does it mean to you to be called "holy"?



What's in a Name?

When you started this session, you became (re)acquainted with other participants by talking about your names. As you pray to God, addressing God by name, you become acquainted with God as well.

In the time of the Old Testament, some of God's people thought that the divine name was too holy to be said out loud, so they used the term *Adonai*, which meant "Lord." Jesus' invited his disciples to address God intimately, with the name *Abba*, which could be translated as "Daddy."

What's in a Name?

Your Names and Titles God's Names and Titles

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

With one other participant, talk about the names or titles that various people use to address you. Have your partner say several back to you, using different tones of voice. How does each tone of voice change (or not change) who you are? Your relationships?

Now try the same thing with God's titles or names. Think of several ways of addressing God, including titles or names that are based on verbs ("Liberator," "Reconciler"), and say each one using several different tones of voice.



- Although your naming of God does not change God, how does it change the way you perceive God and the relationship you have with God?
- How do different names and different tones of voice, and the feelings attached to them, change the way you pray to God?
- How do those feelings change with your life circumstances?

Exploring the Meaning of Prayer

Prayer is a word with many different meanings. As you move through your life, prayer can take on new dimensions for daily living. In this section, and in the following two sessions, you will find quotations that present the thoughts of a variety of Christians about the nature of prayer and the importance of the Lord's Prayer in their lives. Use the quotes as the basis for personal sharing with other *Connections* participants.

The meaning of prayer can be described in simple phrases like those that follow. Read each one, then select one that reflects the meaning of prayer for you at this moment in your life.

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire.

Prayer is the process of intentionally turning the focus of the soul's sincere desire upon the active nature of the Divine Love and by every device within its power holding it there until it becomes engaged.

(From Prayer and Worship, by Douglas V. Steere, page 12.)

Prayer is grace.

Furthermore, God ... causes our prayer to proceed from God's grace. Wherever there is the grace of God, [humanity] prays. God works in us, for we know not how to pray as we ought. It is the Spirit of God that incites us and enables us to pray in a fitting manner. We are not skilled to judge whether we are worthy or capable of praying, or whether we have sufficient zeal to pray. Grace in itself is the answer to this question. When we are comforted by the grace of God, we begin to pray with or without words.

(From Prayer According to the Catechisms of the Reformation, by Karl Barth, page 24.)

Prayer is action.

But when it comes to prayer, we act as though it's time wasted, we aren't doing anything. In fact, just the opposite is true. Someone has said, "Prayer is not a substitute for action; prayer is an action for which there is no substitute." Prayer is action because prayer is a conscious choice to build a quality relationship with God.

(From Renewing God's People, by Susan Fillies and Ingrid Dvirnak, page 18.)

Prayer is listening to God.

Prayer is not just speaking to God, but includes "listening" to God's Word as it comes to us through Scripture, the Sacraments, hymns, the liturgy, other people's words and lives, and our own memory.

Paying attention to God's presence involves contemplative prayer in which we speak few or even no words. The person praying seeks to listen for God who is always present.

(From "Teach Us to Pray," by Bradley Hanson, page 14.)

To this day I suckle at the Lord's Prayer like a child, and as an old man eat and drink from it and never get my fill. It's the very best prayer.

(From "A Simple Way to Pray," Luther's Works, Volume 48, page 200.)

I am convinced that when Christians rightly pray the Lord's Prayer at any time or use any portion of it as they may desire, their praying is more than adequate.

(From "Personal Prayer Book," Luther's Works, Volume 48, page 20.)

Think about the past week. Identify a particular occasion in which you prayed from the perspective of the meaning you selected. Talk about this prayer episode with another participant.

Experiencing Until Next Time

During the coming week, think about the worlds of a particular person. This may be someone from your congregation, your workplace, your social circle — even someone you don't know.

As you think about this person living her or his week, take time at least twice during the week to offer a general or specific prayer for the person.

Growing Together

Sing or speak

together the words of the hymn, "Lord, Teach Us How to Pray Aright." The words are printed below.

**Lord, teach us how to pray aright,
With reverence and with fear.
Though dust and ashes in your sight,
We may, we must draw near.**

**We perish if we cease from prayer;
Oh, grant us pow'r to pray.
And when to meet you we prepare,
Lord, meet us on our way.**

**Give deep humility; the sense
Of godly sorrow give.
A strong desire, with confidence,
To hear your voice and live.**

**Faith is the only sacrifice
That can for sin atone;
To cast our hopes, to fix our eyes
On Christ, on Christ alone.**

**Give these, and then your will be done;
Thus strengthened with all might,
We, through your Spirit and your Son,
Shall pray, and pray aright.**

Reflect on these questions with other participants:

- How important is prayer — of any kind and any length — in your daily routine?
- In what way is God the only real teacher of prayer?
- Paul says, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). What do these words mean to you?

Connecting With Scriptures

Prayer:

Pray together the Lord's Prayer.

There is a strong relationship between belief and prayer. As you read and pray these sections of Scripture you will see how they benefit the spiritual life of God's people.

Read John 11.

1 What do you believe about the resurrection? Share with someone your faith in Jesus and his promise of resurrection.

I am the resurrection

2 Where is heaven? How does praying to God "in heaven" connect you to God in your daily life?

and the life.

Read Romans 10.

1 For whom do you pray that they might hear the Word of God and know God's love in Christ?

Faith
comes from
what is heard,
and

2 What do you see as the relationship between hearing the Word, believing it, confessing the faith and prayer?

what is heard
comes through the
word of Christ.



Read Psalm 5.

1 How marvelous that God hears your words! Open your heart to God's listening heart and speak.

2 For what does the psalmist pray? For what do you pray?

Give ear to my words, O Lord.

Using Other Resources

By praying one has interfered with God, or rather one has permitted God to interfere with oneself.

From *The Hidden Discipline*, by Martin Marty, page 68.

Session Two

God's Will and Grace

Power and Control The Second and Third Petitions of the Lord's Prayer

Going to the Heart of the Matter

In this session, we explore the Second and Third Petitions of the Lord's Prayer:

**Your kingdom come.
Your will be done, on
earth as in heaven.**

A series of age-old questions come into focus in these petitions. We have mixed feelings about our intimacy with God. We want to be closer to God, but we also want to control our own lives.

In these parts of the Lord's Prayer we can find answers to these questions, bound together in the concepts of God's kingdom(s) and God's will.





Beginning Where We Are

In the previous session, you were invited to spend time between sessions thinking about another person and the worlds in which that person lives. With another *Connections* participant, take a minute to talk about your reflections on this person's ministry:

- How does this person combine occupation — that which occupies his or her time — and ministry?
- What did you learn about yourself as you reflected on this person's life circumstances?
- How does God's kingdom come to this person?
- How does this person do God's will?
- What were your prayers for him or her during the past week?

This session continues the first session's focus on prayer as a valued gift in the life of Christians. Think together about the relationship between your will and God's will in your life:

- In what ways does prayer help you make the connection between your will and God's will?
- When or where might you pray for God's rule in your life?



Connecting With the r Faith

The Second Petition **Your kingdom come.**

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

In fact, God's kingdom comes on its own without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also come to us.

How does this come about?

Whenever our heavenly Father gives us the Holy Spirit, so that through God's grace we believe God's Holy Word and live godly lives here in time and hereafter in eternity.

Large Catechism (Excerpt Summary)

We prayed in the first petition that God would prevent the world from using God's glory and name to cloak its lies and wickedness. Here we ask that God's kingdom may come. God's kingdom comes of itself without our prayer and yet we pray that it may come to us. That is, we ask that it may prevail among us and with us, so that we may be a part of those among whom God's name is hallowed and God's kingdom flourishes.

What is God's kingdom?

Simply what we learned in the Creed, namely, that God sent the Son, Christ our Lord, into the world to redeem and deliver us from the power of the devil and to bring us to God's self and rule us as a king of righteousness, life, and salvation against sin, death, and an evil conscience. God also gave the Holy Spirit to teach us through God's holy word and enlighten and strengthen us in faith.

We pray here at the outset that all this may be realized in us and that God's name may be praised

through God's holy Word and our Christian lives. We pray that, led by the Holy Spirit, many may come into the kingdom of grace and become partakers of salvation, so that we may all remain together eternally in this kingdom, which has now made its appearance among us.

God's kingdom comes to us in two ways: first, it comes here, in time, through the Word and faith, and secondly, in eternity, it comes through the return of Christ. Now, we pray for both of these, that it may come to those who are not yet in it, and that it may come by daily growth here and in eternal life.

You see that we are praying here not for a crust of bread or for a temporal perishable blessing, but for an eternal, priceless treasure and everything that God possesses. It would be far too

We are praying here not for a crust of bread or for a temporal perishable blessing, but for an eternal, priceless treasure.

God claims the honor of giving far more abundantly and liberally than anyone can comprehend, like an eternal, inexhaustible fountain which, the more it gushes forth and overflows, the more it continues to give.

great for any human heart to dare to desire if God had not commanded us to ask for it. God claims the honor of giving far more abundantly and liberally than anyone can comprehend — like an eternal, inexhaustible fountain which, the more it gushes forth and overflows, the more it continues to give.

Reflection Questions

1 What do you imagine it will be like to remain together eternally with God? Do you pray for it?

2 The word “kingdom” seems strange in the language of our culture. What do you imagine when you think about God’s reign on earth and hereafter?

3 What is one example of a way in which you relate to others so that they “may become partakers of salvation”?

The Third Petition

Your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

In fact, God’s good and gracious will comes about without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also come about in and among us.

How does this come about?

Whenever God breaks and hinders every evil scheme and will— as are present in the will of the devil, the world, and our flesh— that would not allow us to hallow God’s name and would prevent the coming of God’s kingdom, and instead whenever God strengthens us and keeps us steadfast in the Word and in faith until the end of our lives. This is God’s gracious and good will.

Large Catechism (Excerpt Summary)

We must also pray that God’s will may be done. We must suffer an astonishing amount of attacks and assaults from all who venture to hinder and thwart the fulfillment of the first two petitions.

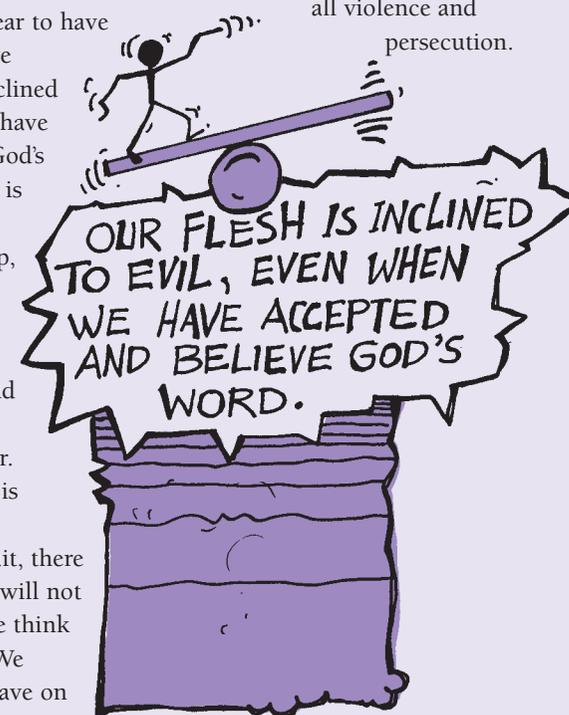
The devil cannot bear to have anyone teach or believe rightly. Our flesh is inclined to evil, even when we have accepted and believe God’s Word. The world, too, is perverse and wicked. These the devil stirs up, fanning and feeding the flames, in order to hinder us, put us to flight, cut us down, and bring us once more under the devil’s power.

Where God’s Word is preached, accepted or believed, and bears fruit, there the blessed holy cross will not be far away. Let no one think they will have peace. We must sacrifice all we have on

earth; we must remain steadfast and suffer patiently.

We must pray that God’s will may be done among us without hindrance, so that the devil may accomplish nothing and we may remain steadfast in the face of

all violence and persecution.



Reflection Questions

1 What does it mean to you when you ask that God's will be done in your life? In the whole world?

2 How do you picture the forces that work against God's will, including the devil?

3 How do you view this age-old dilemma about evil in the world? "If God is all-loving, then God must not be all-powerful. If God is all-powerful, then God must not be all-loving."

Connecting With r Daily Life

World Views
Can the world be made good, or is there little hope before the Second Coming? That question has been debated throughout history. In this activity, you will explore several ways you might answer this question.

In *Christ and Culture*, H. Richard Niebuhr describes five different ways in which people view the relationship between Christ (Jesus Christ and all Christians) and culture (the social heritage of human achievement, for example, language, ideas, customs, technical processes and social organization).



Christ Against Culture

(Type 1: Opposition)

The Christian opposes the customs and human achievement of society, feeling that people are in danger of being corrupted by the society.

Christ In Culture

(Type 2: Agreement)

The Christian agrees with the culture. Jesus is a good example in culture. The nature of Christianity is reasonable, not revolutionary.



Christ Above Culture

(Type 3: Fulfillment)

Christ is the fulfillment of cultural hopes, but something in him neither arises out of nor contributes to society. Christ enters culture from above.

Christ and Culture in Paradox

(Type 4: Tension)

Christ and culture do not agree with each other, nor are they totally opposed to each other. They hold each other in tension. Each has its own authority. The tension between the two exists outside and inside each Christian.



Christ the Transformer of Culture

(Type 5: Conversion)

Christ and Christians try to convert culture. There is no turning from self to God except in society, so the Christian does not turn away from society but seeks to change it.

To assist you in exploring these world views, here are examples of each world view from the perspective of a person who is trying to deal with television as a cultural medium.



Christ Against Culture

Get rid of the television set!

Christ In Culture

Enjoy television programs and see in them religious inspiration and “Messiah figures.”



Christ Above Culture

Add religious programs to television, such as five-minute devotions or half-hour Christian stories.

Christ and Culture in Paradox

Use television, but also critique it. All aspects of the medium have value for theological reflection.



Christ the Transformer of Culture

Attempt to reform television; change the programming.

The World View of Chris Kline



Imagine how Chris would view the world if Chris held the first view (Type 1, Christ Against Culture) of the world. Consider Chris’ perspective about work, Chris’ family and friends, the community and the various recreational and volunteer activities in which Chris participates. When you have spent a minute or two talking from the perspective of the first type, consider Chris’ world view from the outlook of the second, third, fourth and fifth types. (See page 25 for reference.)

Your World View

Now think about your own view of the world in terms of Christ and culture. Identify a situation or problem you have experienced recently. How do you view this situation in terms of God’s role in it? As you think about the situation, which of the world views noted above is closest to your own world view? How does that view differ from the world view of members of your *Connections* group? How does that world view affect the ministry you do together with members of your congregation?

Exploring the Meaning of Prayer

Prayer is setting our hearts on God.

If scripture depicts a God whose heart is irrevocably set on us, prayer is the continuing work of setting our hearts on God. In prayer, the truest center of our being turns toward our Source, even as the salmon turns from the great sea toward its river of origin. (From "Editor's Introduction," by John S. Mogabgab, Weavings, July/August, 1996, pages 2-3.)

Prayer is working with God.

Prayer is often defined as speech with God. It may begin that way. But prayer of a high order rarely stops there. Real prayer is more nearly work with God. (From Prayer and Worship, by Douglas V. Steere, page 13.)

Prayer is being open to the new.

Prayer leads you to see new paths and to hear new melodies in the air. Prayer is the breath of your life which gives you freedom to go and stay where you wish and to find the many signs which point out the way to a new land. (From With Open Hands, by Henri Nouwen, page 157.)

Where in these descriptions do you find yourself most frequently? In what life situations would one or more of these descriptions especially apply?

Experiencing Until Next Time

Attend a city council, church council or school board meeting, or watch a session of the state or national legislature on C-Span, local access TV or on-line. Pay attention to the world views that are expressed during the meeting. What kind of "principalities and powers" are evident?

Be aware of your decision-making processes during the coming week.

- In what ways are you seeking God's will in this decision?
- What dilemmas and difficulties do you have in determining what is God's will and what is your own?



Sing or speak together the words of the familiar song "Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God."

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and its righteousness, And all these things shall be added unto you. Allelu, alleluia.

Ask and it shall be given unto you; seek and you shall find. Knock and the door shall be opened unto you. Allelu, alleluia.

Think about this question:

- How might praying "Your kingdom come, your will be done" regularly change how you pray and what you do?

Pray together:

Eternal God, we pray that your kingdom has come, will come now and will come fully at Christ's return. Encourage us, mold us and empower us that we may be agents of your will. In your holy name we pray. Amen

The matter of kingdom has some surprising dimensions in the Bible. As you read and pray these biblical selections, be ready for the Spirit to show you what you've never seen before!

Read John 12.

1 As Jesus begins his journey through Holy Week, where are you in the crowd? What do his actions and his words here mean for your daily journey?

2 How does Mary's anointing Jesus' feet and Jesus' riding on a donkey into Jerusalem cut through your understanding of power and control?

a grain of
wheat...
remains just
a single grain;
but if it
dies
it bears much
fruit.

Read Romans 11.

1 Paul speaks of God's people stumbling and having a sluggish spirit. If it is God's will that no people be lost, how is it some "branches" have "broken off"?

O the depth
of the riches
and wisdom
and knowledge
of God!

2 We pray for God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done. In what ways are the gifts and the calling of God irrevocable in your life?

Read Psalm 46.

1 Consider the power of God, God's will and God's kingdom. What might these mean in this world in the coming week?

2 We associate this psalm with the Reformation. How is God continuing to reform the Church today?

God is our
refuge and strength.

Using Other Resources

The problem of unbelief is squarely faced in this petition. To pray for the kingdom of God is to ask that one's own small view of God be shattered, that God be permitted to break through into all of life, that one's priorities of living be rearranged.

From *The Hidden Discipline*, by Martin Marty, page 72.

Session Three

God Cares for Us

Bread and the Body

The Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer

Going to the
Heart
of the Matter

¹ In this session, we explore the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer:

Give us today our daily bread.

In the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer, we are almost overwhelmed by the grandeur: the name of God, the kingdom of God, the will of God. With the next three petitions, the "us" of this prayer becomes explicit. Here we dare to ask God to be concerned with ordinary human activities. God becomes concretely present among those who are praying and living at particular times and in particular places.

The Fourth Petition asks God to continue to provide for the needs of our daily life: bread and the body. This petition is specific. With Jesus we pray "today" and for "daily bread." Although Luther's list in *The Small Catechism* contains the necessities for the life of a German farmer in the 16th century, the list applies equally well to our lives.

The Fourth Petition also suggests responsibility. As children of God, we have a duty to care for people around the world. As we pray, we remind ourselves to help all people to enjoy the bread God provides.

Beginning
Where We Are

At the end of the last session it was suggested that you observe a board or legislative meeting to see the world views expressed by members and participants. With several other *Connections* participants, talk about your experience.

- What views of culture were expressed?
- Which of Niebuhr's types (see page 25) did these views reflect?
- What approach would you have taken to the topic under consideration?

Exploring the Meaning of Prayer

In this section you continue your reflection on the matter of prayer. Read the following items and talk about the questions following each reading.

Prayer here.

When Jesus gave the disciples the Lord's Prayer, he was not in a special place. Both biblical passages giving the prayer indicate that the place was quite ordinary. In Matthew, the place was on a mountain. In Luke, it appears that Jesus and the disciples were on the road, journeying from one location to another. By instructing the disciples about prayer in these ordinary places, Jesus was teaching that any place is a good place to pray.

(Adapted from Praying Through the Lord's Prayer, by Steve Harper, pages 28-29.)

What are the "ordinary places" where you pray?

Prayer now.

When Jesus gave the Lord's Prayer, he was praying at an ordinary time. No bells had rung indicating that the hour for prayer had arrived. There is no indication that the day was a prescribed holy day on the Jewish religious calendar. Jesus simply picked a time and prayed.

This is the model he gave us throughout his lifetime. The Gospels reveal Jesus praying early in the morning and late at night. Luke tells us, "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (5:16). Sometimes he would pray briefly; at other times he spent hours in prayer.

(Adapted from Praying Through the Lord's Prayer, by Steve Harper, pages 40-41.)

How can you remind yourself that any time is a good time to pray?

Prayer in the midst of our lives.

Most of the time, we speak of prayer only when specific momentary circumstances give rise to it. When there is war, we pray for peace; when there is drought, we pray for rain; when a test is coming, we pray for knowledge; when a friend is sick, we pray that he'll get well; and when someone dies, we pray for her eternal rest. Our prayer is interwoven with everything else which busies our day.

(From With Open Hands, by Henri Nouwen, page 76.)

How is your praying interwoven with everything else that busies your day?

Prayer connects faith and our daily lives.

This strategy [when our minds wander during prayer, bringing different thoughts into the prayer] connects faith and our day-to-day responsibilities and relationships. When we relax a bit, as we usually do when we pray, the issues of life come bubbling up from within — anxieties and hopes, hurts and thanks. If we keep all these thoughts out of our prayers, we build a wall between faith and life. But if we select the truly significant thoughts that bubble up and incorporate them into our prayers, faith has the chance to influence life.

(From Teach Us To Pray, by Bradley Hanson, page 46.)

How can you open your mind more while you pray to connect your faith with your day-to-day life?

Connecting With the Faith

The Fourth Petition

Give us today our daily bread.

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

In fact, God gives daily bread without our prayer, even to all evil people, but we ask in this prayer that God cause us to recognize what our daily bread is and to receive it with thanksgiving.

What then does “daily bread” mean?

Everything included in the necessities and nourishment for our bodies, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, farm, fields, livestock, money, property, an upright spouse, upright children, upright members of the household, upright and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, decency, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.

Large Catechism (Excerpt Summary)

Here we consider the poor breadbasket, the needs of our body and our life on earth. (Bread) is a brief and simple word, but very comprehensive. When you pray for “daily bread” you pray for everything that is necessary in order to have and enjoy it. You must enlarge and extend your thoughts to include not only the flour bin, but also the broad fields and the whole land.

This petition includes everything that belongs to our entire life in this world. Our life

requires not only food and clothing, but also peace and concord in our daily business and in associations of every description with the people among whom we live and move, in short, everything that pertains to the regulation of our domestic and our civil or political affairs. For where dissension, strife, and war prevail, here our daily bread is taken away, or at least reduced.

God wishes to show us how God cares for us in all our needs and faithfully provides for our daily existence. Although God gives and provides these blessings



In this petition we ask God to be concerned with ordinary human activities.



bountifully, even for wicked people and rogues, yet God wishes us to pray for them so we may realize that we have received them from God's hand. When God withdraws God's hand, nothing can prosper or last for any length of time, as indeed we see and experience every day. How much trouble there is now in the world on account of daily exploitation and usury in public business, trading, and labor on the part of those who wantonly oppress the poor and deprive them of their daily bread. Let them take care lest this petition of the Lord's Prayer be turned against them.

Reflection Questions

1 "God gives and provides these blessings bountifully" for all. What does this mean in the face of unequal distribution of "bread" in the world?

2 What does your praying this petition mean in terms of what you have? How might your prayer simplify your lifestyle?

3 In what ways are you a person whom God uses to provide daily bread?

Connecting With r Activity One: Daily Life A Visit to a World of a Participant

During this session you and the other *Connections* participants will be visiting a world of one of the participants. This might be the person's place of work or volunteer activity, home and family or a place of recreation.

The purpose of the visit is to help you get acquainted with a particular world of the host and thereby get to know the person better. It is also, perhaps more importantly, a way for you to recognize that God is at work in this particular world.

The visits in this unit will give you an opportunity to explore participants' worlds in light of the Lord's Prayer. You will discover ways in which the petitions of the Lord's Prayer relate to particular places and people.



Making a Visit

1 As you tour the place where your host has invited you, ask:

- What are some of the problems in this world?
- What are some of the satisfactions?

2 Listen carefully as your host describes the world and what happens there. Reflect on these questions:

- How is God making bread in this place?
- How do the people in this place share this bread with the world?
- How does the host reflect God's will for this place?
- What specific prayers are appropriate for this place?
- What works of compassion and justice take place here?

3 Make the faith connections. Reflect on these questions:

- What is God doing here as Creator? As Redeemer? As Sanctifier?
- In what ways does this place reflect the kingdom of God?

Activity Two: Seeing Gifts of Daily Bread in Daily Life



Robert doesn't make a lot of money as a doorman, but he plays the lottery every week. He watches TV anxiously every evening with his wife and four-year-old daughter as the numbers are drawn. One night, he wins \$10,000.

June's husband of 15 years tells her he's going to leave her and live with a woman from his office. June and her husband have three children, ages 13, 6 and 2. Between the two of them, they don't have a lot of money. June wonders how she and the kids will get by.



Ben and Shannon, newlyweds, are driving home one night after seeing a movie. A drunk driver cuts them off at an intersection. Shannon's injuries leave her paralyzed for life.

Helen and her two children have been receiving government subsidies for five years. As a single mother, she finds it hard to work when she can't afford day care. A caring woman at an employment service places her at a good-paying job with a company that allows her flex time.



Continued on next page



After 20 years with the same company, Brian is laid off. Although they give him compensation pay, he loses most of his retirement and pension benefits.

With another person, talk about these questions:

- **How does God provide daily bread in each of these scenarios?**
- **How can those who have more “daily bread” share it (financially, spiritually and physically)?**
- **How can people who struggle financially and emotionally celebrate God’s gifts?**

Think about challenges you have had in your own life. How have you dealt with unfair situations? Where was God in those situations? When you have been more fortunate, how have you shared your wealth?

Experiencing Until Next Time

Go to a food kitchen, homeless shelter or other facility for those in need. If possible, spend some time working there. As you do so, reflect on these questions:

- **What did you observe about the ways God cares for us all?**
- **How is food for the body connected with food for the spirit?**



Speak together the words of the hymn, “Forth in Thy Name, Oh Lord, I Go” that are printed here.

**Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go,
My daily labor to pursue;
Thee, only thee, resolved to know
In all I think or speak or do.**

**The task thy wisdom has assigned,
Oh, let me cheerfully fulfill;
In all my works thy presence find,
And prove thy good and perfect will.**

**Thee may I set at my right hand,
Whose eyes my inmost substance see,
And labor on at thy command,
And offer all my works to thee.**

**Give me to bear thine easy yoke,
And ev’ry moment watch and pray,
And still to things eternal look,
And hasten to thy glorious day.**

Reflect on the following:

- **What is the latest “daily thing” you have prayed about?**
- **How has this made God more real to you?**

Pray together the Lord’s Prayer.

As you have seen, bread is a blessing whose dimensions are as large as God's love for us. As you read and pray the following passages, see how God blesses the world beyond measure.

Read John 13.

1 Washing, serving, loving ... and betraying. How is each of these part of your own life as a Christian?

2 The one who ate at the Lord's Table also betrayed Jesus. How is God's love larger than anything you could ask or do?

Read Romans 12.

1 By God's mercy you are called to present your body as a living sacrifice to God as your "spiritual worship." What kind of "sacrifices" do you make; what kind of "spiritual worship" are they?

2 How do you dare to pray "Give us this day our daily bread" knowing that your prayer includes your enemies?

Read Psalm 72.

1 This psalm of Solomon is a prayer for authority to rule with justice. Pray for national and world leaders for just distribution of the bounty of the earth.

2 Pray for those who are poor and for ways to be involved in seeing that none go hungry.

May there be
abundance
of grain in the land;
may it wave
on the tops of the
mountains.

Using Other Resources

The one who prays "Give us this day our daily bread" is not asking, "Give me the minimum" or "How can I gain the maximum?" That person is being asked to enjoy the bread that is set before him or her and the life that is given them.

From *The Hidden Discipline*, by Martin Marty, page 77.

Session Four

Making Excuses

Living with Forgiving The Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer

Going to the Heart of the Matter

¹ In this session, we explore the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer:

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

You are asked, even expected, to be forgiving every day. A coworker gets a promotion even though you believe you deserve it. Someone takes your parking space. Your family cell phone plan has \$100 in unexplained additional charges this month. You invited 15 people to a picnic; now it's cold and rainy and they are calling to cancel for a variety of reasons. How do you find the strength to forgive?

Forgiveness requires great inner strength, strength of faith in God and strength of faith in yourself. This part of the Lord's Prayer reminds all of us of the importance of forgiveness. It is the essence of simplicity. But the realities with which the prayer deals are very complex and difficult to face: to forgive others even as we are forgiven by God.



Beginning Where We Are

In the previous session, you were invited to spend some time in a food pantry or homeless shelter.

- In what ways did you see God providing bread at that place? That is, how did God provide for people's needs?
- Through whom did God do this?
- In what ways did you receive bread at that place?

Think of two or three people whose lives are connected to yours in an intimate way. Write their names here and complete the chart.

Names:			
How have you experienced forgiveness from this person?			
When have you forgiven this person?			
When have you found it difficult to forgive or accept forgiveness from this person?			

Talk about your reflections, as much as you are comfortable sharing, with another person. Focus on this question: Which do you find harder, to forgive or to accept forgiveness?

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

We ask in this prayer that our heavenly Father would not regard our sins nor deny these petitions on their account, for we are worthy of nothing for which we ask, nor have we earned it. Instead we ask that God would give us all things by grace, for we daily sin much and indeed deserve only punishment. So, on the other hand, we, too, truly want to forgive heartily and to do good gladly to those who sin against us.

**Large Catechism
(Excerpt Summary)**

This petition has to do with our poor, miserable life. We stumble daily and transgress because we live in the world among people who sorely vex us and give us occasion for impatience, wrath, vengeance, etc. Besides, Satan is at our backs, besieging us on every side.

Here again there is great need to call upon God and pray. Not that God does not forgive sin even without and before prayer. God gave us the Gospel, in which there is nothing but forgiveness, before we prayed or even thought of it. But the point here is for us to recognize and accept this forgiveness. We sin daily in word and deed, in acts of commission and omission. Our conscience becomes restless; it fears God's displeasure, and so it loses the comfort and confidence of the Gospel.

If people boast of their goodness and despise others, they should examine themselves in the light of this petition. Let no persons think that they will ever in this life reach the point where

they do not need forgiveness. Where the heart is not right with God and cannot achieve such confidence, it will never dare to pray.

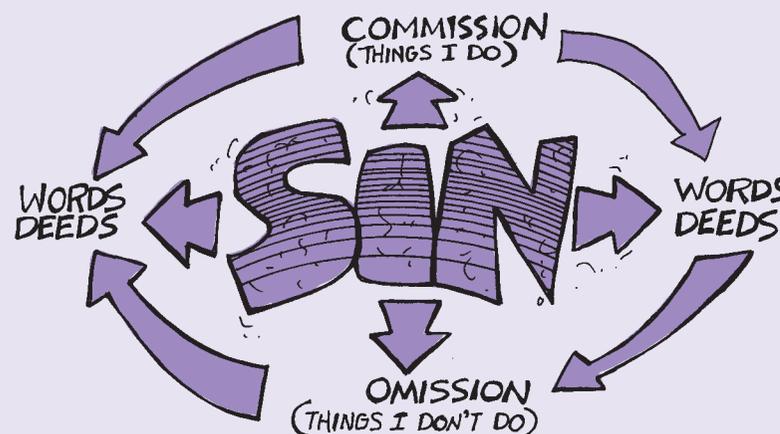
Inasmuch as we sin greatly against God every day and yet God forgives it all through grace, we must always forgive our neighbor who does us harm, violence, and injustice, bears malice toward us, etc. If you do not forgive, do not think that God forgives you. But if you forgive you have the comfort and assurance that you are forgiven in heaven. Not on account of your forgiving, for God does it altogether freely, out of pure grace, but because God has promised it, as the Gospel teaches. God has set up this condition for our strengthening and assurance as a sign (Luke 6:37, "Forgive, and you will be forgiven.") for us to use and practice every hour.

Reflection Questions

- 1** Why is it hard at times for you to accept forgiveness from another person? Why is it sometimes hard to accept God's forgiveness?

- 2** How does being forgiven free you to forgive?

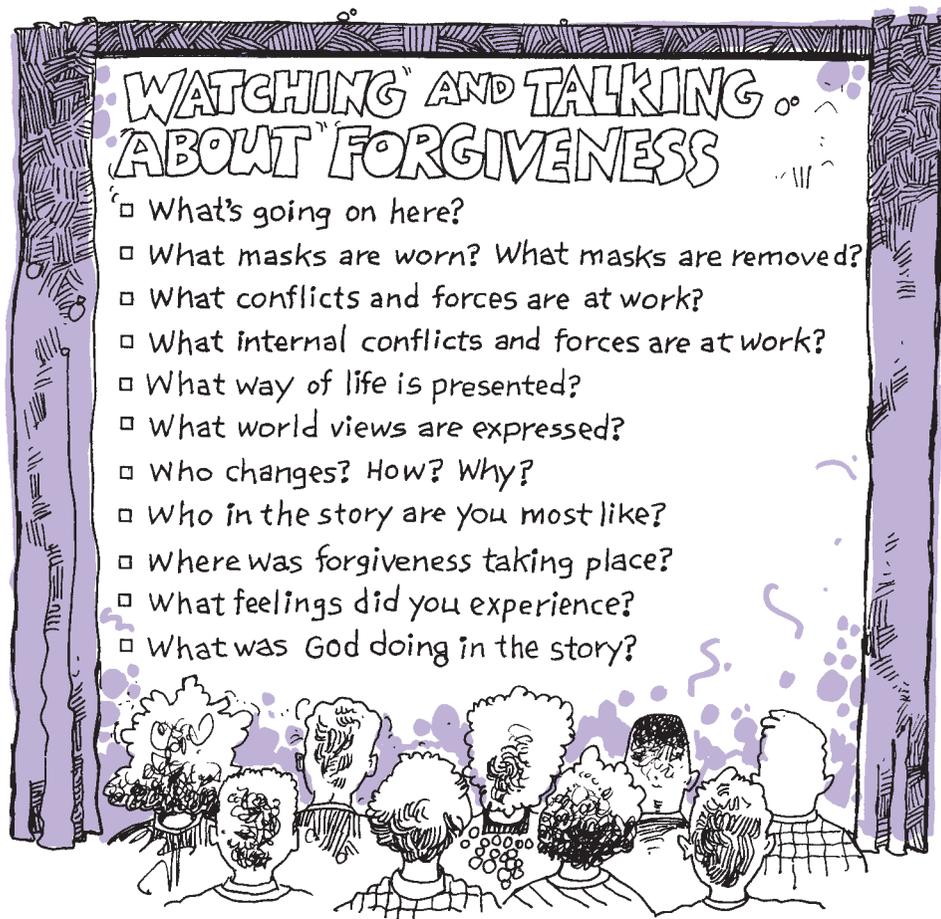
- 3** What are some sins of commission with which you struggle? What are some sins of omission that trouble you?



Connecting With r Daily Life

Films are one of the best arenas in which to see connections between faith and life. With the other participants, identify a current film or local play that will provide substantial discussion about relationships among people. In particular, try to select one that deals with forgiveness or the lack of it. Don't forget to consider classics from the past.

Talk about the experience.



Experiencing Until Next Time

Who in your life do you feel you haven't forgiven? Carefully prepare an electronic message or hand-write a letter to this person, but don't quickly send it off. Take time to think through your willingness to forgive. Because each situation is complex, take additional time to consider your own willingness to accept an apology, or to hear the other person's accusations. Pray about it. Either send off your message, or choose not to, remembering that God forgives you and that faith in God's forgiveness can give you the strength to forgive others.

Growing Together

Speak or sing together
the hymn "Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive" (ELW 605).

**"Forgive our sins as we forgive."
You taught us, Lord, to pray;
But you alone can grant us grace
To live the words we pray.**

**How can your pardon reach and bless
The unforgiving heart
That broods on wrongs and will not let
Old bitterness depart?**

**In blazing light your cross reveals
The truth we dimly knew;
What trivial debts are owed to us;
How great our debt to you!**

**Lord, cleanse the depths within our souls
And bid resentment cease;
Then, bound to all in bonds of love,
Our lives will spread your peace.**

By Rosamond E. Herklots (1905-87). Copyright © 1969; used by permission of Oxford University Press.

Reflect on this quotation:

Thus, we are not faced with an exhortation "Go, forgive," but we are confronted by a simple recognition of a fact: when the pardon of God is received, it enables us to forgive.

(From *Prayer According to the Catechisms of the Reformation*, by Karl Barth, page 67.)

Close with the Lord's Prayer.

Forgiveness is a difficult matter, and the Bible reflects this reality. As you read and pray these sections of Scripture, consider how receiving and giving forgiveness is at the center of the Bible.

Read John 14.

1 Jesus asks, “Have I been with you all this time, and you still do not know me?” What does that mean to you?

Believe in
God,
believe
also in
me.

2 Jesus says, “The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do, and in fact, will do greater works than these.” How might this relate to the Fifth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer?

Read Romans 8.

1 When God searches your heart, God finds the Spirit there. When have you experienced the Spirit praying in you and through you?

The Spirit helps us
in our weakness;
for we do not know
how to pray...

2 How might the Spirit free you to forgive someone it seems impossible to forgive?

Read Psalm 32.

1 How can you feel the freedom that forgiveness provides, both in being forgiven and in forgiving?

2 You could read this psalm as though some people are upright and others are sinners. How does God’s “steadfast love” really extend to all persons through God’s grace?

Happy
are those whose
transgression
is forgiven,
whose sin
is covered.

Using Other Resources

Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we must be saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend and foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love, which is forgiveness.

From *The Irony of American History*, by Reinhold Niebuhr, page 63.

Session Five

Tempted and Tried

Dealing with Dilemmas

The Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer

Going to the
Heart
of the Matter

1 In this session, we explore the Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer:

Save us from the time of trial.

In our contemporary society, temptation is an ongoing entanglement. We are continually bombarded by the message that we need to be something else, have something more. It is so constant that we begin to believe it. We often are tempted to think that others "have it all together." But few of us live totally complete lives.

How do we accept and celebrate what we have? What does it mean to live with integrity — a wholeness that holds us together so temptation won't overwhelm us? In this petition of the Lord's Prayer, we learn how to pray for answers to these questions.

Beginning
Where We Are

In the previous session, you talked about forgiveness and were encouraged to prepare a message for someone whom you needed to forgive. Talk with another person about that experience, whether or not you actually sent the message. You don't need to talk about the details, just how you felt putting your thoughts and feelings into words.

As the week unfolded, you may have had other experiences when you forgave or were forgiven by someone. How did that feel?

With another person, explore some of the following questions:

- **As you think about what occupies your time most days, how does what you do all day benefit you, really?**
- **What do you resent and resist about your daily activities?**
- **What influences in your daily activities are at odds with each other or with your beliefs?**
- **How can you do what needs to be done in your daily life, yet still have some choice in the ways in which it shapes you?**
- **How can you help others as you face these tasks?**

Connecting
With the
Faith

The Sixth Petition

Save us from the time of trial.

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

It is true that God tempts no one, but we ask in this prayer that God would preserve and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice, and that, although we may be attacked by them, we may finally prevail and gain the victory.

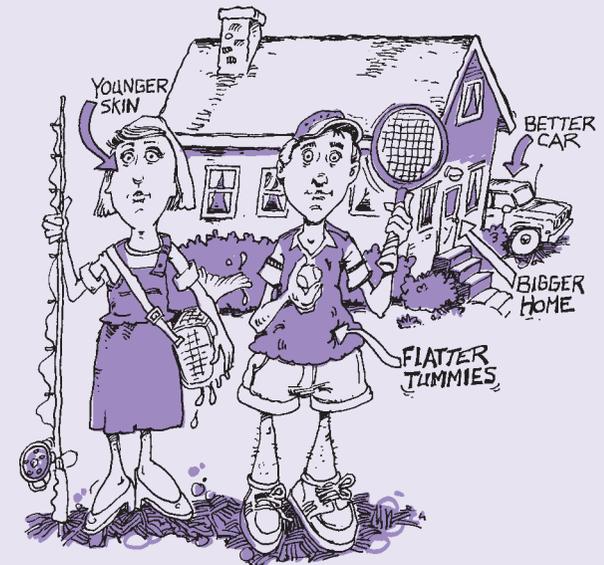
Large Catechism (Excerpt Summary)

Although we have acquired forgiveness, yet such is life that one stands today and falls tomorrow.

Temptation is of three kinds: the flesh, the world, and the devil. We live in the flesh and have the old Adam hanging around our necks that goes to work and lures us daily into unchastity, laziness, gluttony and drunkenness, greed and deceit, into acts of fraud and deception against our neighbor, in short, into all kinds of evil lusts which by nature cling to us. All this often wounds and inflames even an innocent heart.

Next comes the world, which assails us by word and deed and drives us to anger and impatience. There is nothing but hatred and envy, violence, injustice, vengeance, slander, arrogance, and pride, along with fondness for luxury, fame, and power.

Then comes the devil, who baits and badgers us on all sides to make us scorn and despise both the Word and the works of God, to tear us away from faith, hope, and love, to draw us into



Temptation is of three kinds: the flesh, the world and the devil.

unbelief, false security, and stubbornness, and to drive us into despair.

These are the great temptations which every Christian must bear, even if they come one by one. We are attacked, hunted, and harried on all sides; we cry out every hour that God may not allow us to fall back into sin, shame, and unbelief.

This, then, is "leading us not into temptation" when God gives

us power and strength to resist, even though the tribulation is not removed or ended. We cannot help but suffer tribulations, and even be entangled in them, but we pray here that we may not fall into them and be overwhelmed by them.

To feel temptation, therefore, is quite a different thing from consenting and yielding to it. If we did not feel it, it could not be

called temptation. But to consent to it is to give it free reign and neither to resist it nor pray for help against it. At such times your only help is to take refuge in the Lord's Prayer and to appeal to God from your heart. Otherwise, if you attempt to help yourself by your own thoughts you will only make the matter worse. But prayer can resist the devil.

Reflection Questions

1 What are your struggles with the temptations Luther lists, including their many variations?

2 What examples do you face of the world assailing you with "hatred and envy, violence, injustice, vengeance, slander, arrogance and pride, along with fondness for luxury, fame and power"?

3 The devil's work, says Luther, is to tear us from faith into false security. In what ways have you experienced that in your own faith life?

4 How might your personal falling into temptation wound the entire community?

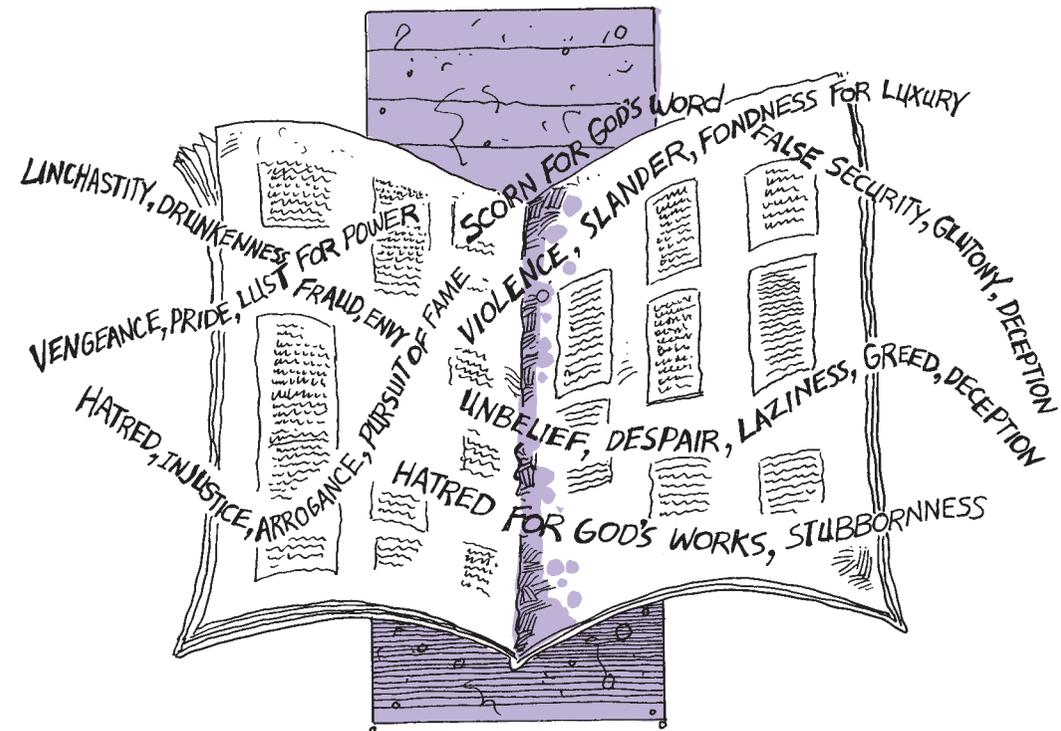
Connecting With Daily Life

Activity One: Noticing Ordinary, Everyday Temptations

Look through a newspaper (in print or online) for examples of "ordinary, everyday temptations." These examples might be found in news articles, ads, letters to the editor, personals or even the comics.

Luther uses a variety of words to describe temptations of "the flesh, the world and the devil." Use them as a guide as you search for examples. Jot down notes about the examples you find in the paper, or tear out the articles that you find and label each with a word or phrase that names the temptation.

Look for subtle temptations in the wording of advertisements, classified ads, photo captions or editorials. Note items that illustrate resisting temptations as well as succumbing to temptations. Add other words to the list as you find examples. Talk about the examples you found with two or three others.



Activity Two: A Visit to a World of a Participant

The visits in this unit will give you an opportunity to explore participants' worlds in light of the Lord's Prayer. In this visit, you will look especially at the Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer.

Making a Visit

1 As you tour the place where your host has invited you, ask:

- What role does the host play in this world?
- With whom does the host relate?
- What are some of the problems in this world?
- What are some of the satisfactions?

2 Listen carefully as your host describes the world and what happens there. Reflect on these questions:

- In what ways do the words of the Lord's Prayer apply to this world?
- What are the temptations of this situation? How are these temptations being addressed?
- What must be forgiven here? How do you see forgiveness being withheld?

3 Make the faith connections. Reflect on these questions:

- How do you see God's kingdom coming here? In what ways can it not come here?
- What do you think God's will is for this place?
- How do God's glories show through here?

Experiencing Until Next Time

Each day between now and the next session, notice and write about one temptation that you face. At the end of the day, think about the temptation and how you dealt with it. Talk to God about it in prayer.

"Save us from the time of trial." Or, in the words of the older version of the Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation." Those are powerful words. During the coming week, reflect on this question: How do those words help me when I am faced with something that goes against what I believe is right?



Speak or sing together the first and fourth verses of the reformation hymn "If You But Trust in God to Guide You" (ELW 769) printed below.

**If you be trust in God to guide you
with gentle hand through all your ways,
You'll find that God is there beside you
when crosses come, in trying days.
Trust then in God's unchanging love;
build on the rock that will not move.**

**Sing, pray, and keep God's way unswerving,
offer your service faithfully.
Trust heaven's word; though undeserving,
you'll find God's promise true to be.
This is our confidence indeed:
God never fails in time of need.**

Using the questions below, reflect on the words of Romans 7:15, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."

- What do I do that I wish I wouldn't do?
- What makes me do it?

Pray this prayer that is based on one from Luther's Personal Prayer Book:

God of comfort and strength, three temptations or trials confront us: the flesh, the world and the devil. Help us renounce and forsake the world's deceit and delusion, allurements and fickleness — all its evil — as we vowed to do in Baptism. Help us that we may remain steadfast and grow in the promise of our Baptism from day to day. Amen

Connecting With Scriptures

The question of temptation is not easily resolved. Immersing yourself in God's Word can counterbalance the weight of temptations because that is where God comes to you. As you pray and read these sections of Scripture, think how they speak to the matter of temptation.

Read John 15.

- 1 Jesus calls you "friend." How do you find the will to love as Jesus does?

Those who abide in me and I in

- 2 Why is the temptation to believe you are no longer connected to God the most basic?

When bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do

nothing.

Read Romans 7.

- 1 What temptations are the most insidious? How does sin deceive you?

- 2 Is Paul saying, "The devil made me do it"? How do you experience the war inside yourself? Where do you find a rescue?

I do not understand my own actions.

Read Psalm 107.

- 1 Listen to the psalmist: "Some wandered. ... Some sat in darkness. ... Some were sick through their sinful ways." In what ways has temptation come upon you?

Let the redeemed of the Lord say SO, those God redeemed from trouble.

- 2 How does God's steadfast love "endure forever" when you are in the middle of temptation?

Using Other Resources

This petition does not concern itself too greatly with the minor vices of life, except that succumbing to them is part of a great betrayal.

From *The Hidden Discipline*, by Martin Marty, 1962, page 83.

Session Six

Saying Amen to God and One Another

Evil – D(evil) – Live The Seventh Petition, Doxology and Amen of the Lord’s Prayer

Going to the Heart of the Matter

¹ In this session, we explore the Seventh Petition, the Doxology and Amen:

And deliver us from evil. [For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever.] Amen.

We, like people of every age and every place, live in the midst of evil. Where is God in the midst of outrageous injustice, in places of unimaginable horror, or chronic suffering? We want to make sense of evil, and we want to know how we can live in the middle of evil. We want to be able to come together before God, and know that evil — the d(evil) — is conquered, once and for all.

In the ending of the Lord’s Prayer we pray again and reassure each other with the truth that God is still powerful beyond all power, and therefore holds power over evil. To that truth, and to this whole prayer, we can say, “Yes, this is all true! Amen!”



In the previous session, you visited the world of one of the participants. With several others, talk about the visit and your reflections on it since then.

- What do you remember particularly about the visit?
- With what did you identify?
- What did you enjoy particularly?
- What temptations did you observe in the place?
- What wrongs or hurts did you notice?

Between the devil and the deep blue sea. If you eat with the devil, Give the devil his due. The devil made me do it. have a long spoon.

Reflect on these quotations from Christian and literary traditions:

QUOTATION	SOURCE
“Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.”	1 Peter 5:8
“Do you renounce all the forces of evil, the devil, and all his empty promises?”	The Service of Holy Baptism
“The devil is ever God’s ape.”	Luther
“The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.”	The Merchant of Venice

As you consider these expressions, talk about these questions:

- What is your understanding of the devil? of evil?
- Where have you seen systematic evil?

Diabolos = The Slanderer
 Satan = The Accuser
 Belial = Worthlessness
 Beelzebub = Prince of Demons

This petition seems to be speaking of the devil as the sum of all evil.

And deliver us from evil.

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

We ask in this prayer, as in a summary, that our Father in heaven may deliver us from all kinds of evil—affecting body or soul, property or reputation—and at last, when our final hour comes, may grant us a blessed end and take us by grace from this valley of tears to godself in heaven.

**Large Catechism
(Excerpt Summary)**

In Greek this petition reads, “Deliver or keep us from the Evil One, or the Wicked One.” The petition seems to be speaking of the devil as the sum of all evil.

This petition includes all the evil that may befall us under the devil’s kingdom: poverty, shame, death, and, in short, all the tragic misery and heartache of which there is so incalculably much more on earth.

Since the devil is not only a liar, but also a murderer, the devil incessantly seeks our life, driving some to insanity, many to suicide

or other dreadful catastrophes. If God did not support us, we would not be safe from the devil for a single hour.

Thus you see how God wants us to pray to God for everything that affects our bodily welfare and directs us to seek and expect help from no one but God. This petition God has put last, for if we are to be protected and delivered from all evil, God’s name must first be hallowed in us, God’s kingdom come among us, and God’s will be done. Then God will preserve us from sin and shame and from everything else that harms or injures us.

Reflection Questions

1 If you turn the letters of “evil” around, they spell “live.” If you add a “d” to evil it spells “devil.” What connections do you see among these three words?

2 How has God, by “setting before us all these afflictions,” taken away any excuse for not praying?

[For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever.] Amen.

Small Catechism

What does this mean?

That I should be certain that such petitions are acceptable to and heard by our Father in heaven, for God commanded us to pray like this and has promised to hear us. “Amen, amen” means “Yes, yes, it is going to come about just like this.”

**Large Catechism
(Excerpt Summary)**

Thus God has briefly set before us all the afflictions that may ever beset us in order that we may never have an excuse for failing to pray. But the efficacy of prayer consists in our learning also to say “Amen” to it — that is, not to doubt that our prayer is surely heard and will be granted. This word is an unquestioning affirmation of faith. Where such faith is wanting, there can be no real prayer.

It is a delusion when people say “Why should I be so bold as to boast that God hears my prayer? I am only a poor sinner.” That means they have their eye not on God’s promise but on their own worthiness, so they despise God and accuse God of lying. As St. James says, “If anyone prays, let that one ask in faith, with no doubting.” We must not in any way despise our prayers.

Reflection Questions

1 Power and glory are realities in your daily life. From your experience, who has the power and who gets the glory?

2 How do you attempt to give glory to God in your life?

3 In what areas of your daily life do you want to say, “Amen!”?

4 How and when have you known with certainty that God has heard your prayer?

Connecting With *r* Your Situation Daily Life

In your life you face times of temptation, times when God's glory fills your worlds, times when "Amen!" comes bounding into your thinking. Think how you might construct a quick role-play drama of a situation in which the content of this part of the Lord's Prayer is evident. If you were the narrator or director of this drama:

- What characters would there be?
- How would the story begin and end?
- How would the feelings you originally felt in the real situation be understood by members of the audience?

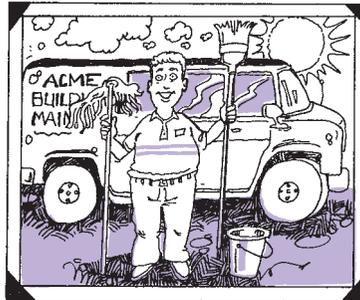
A Situation Study

Pat had a hard time finding a job until an introduction by a friend brought employment with a small company. Pat was happy to get the job and was pleased to receive favorable comments from the boss after only a few weeks on the job.

Shortly after starting work, however, Pat noticed two major problems. The first had to do with personal relations. Another worker began spreading false rumors and making negative remarks about Pat's work to the boss. The worker seemed to be jealous of Pat.

Pat had noticed questionable behavior on the part of that coworker. The employee seemed to be taking long breaks during the day and spending a lot of time with another employee. Pat was tempted to report the concern, yet Pat was aware of the temptation to find fault in the other employee because that coworker was damaging Pat's reputation.

The other major problem was institutional and systematic, that is, the way the organization as a whole operated. Pat learned that the company was running on a very narrow profit margin. As a result, the owners increased the pressure to work harder and meet deadlines sooner. This brought



THE COMPANY



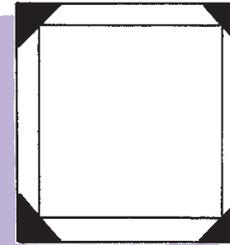
THE JEALOUS CO-WORKER



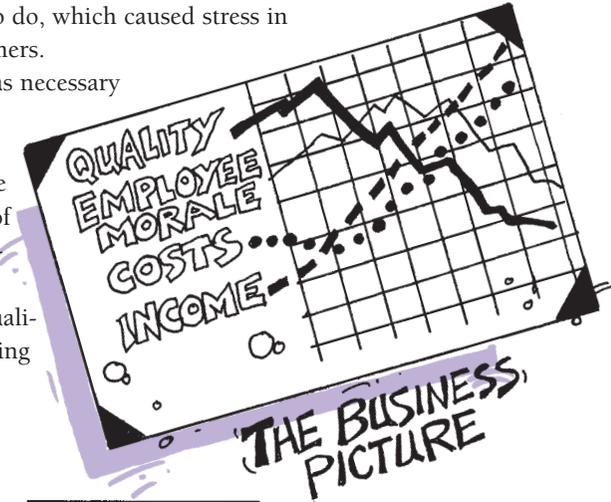
THE QUESTIONABLE EMPLOYEE

employees and troubles for customers.

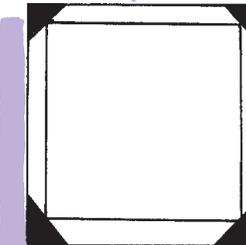
Pat knew some compromise was necessary — there is no perfect world. Pat also knew that God's forgiveness made it possible to continue in the job. But Pat still feared the effect of these problems on employees' attitudes. Staying on the job meant becoming less concerned about quality and more concerned about staying in business.



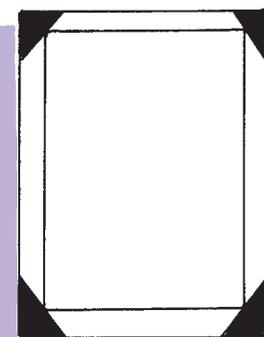
THE DILEMMAS



THE BUSINESS PICTURE



THE EVILS



A SIMILAR PICTURE IN MY LIFE

Experiencing Until Next Time

Connecting with the Congregation

As you end this unit you may want to find ways to bring what you have learned into the general life of the congregation, and invite other members to join this group.

- Put an article in your church or synod newsletter or on their web pages about your *Connections* experience. Include quotations, examples and pictures to help others understand what *Connections* is all about. Include information about when another unit of *Connections* will begin.
- Share with a friend from the congregation some of your *Connections* experiences.
- Brainstorm with the congregation council or other committees ways in which the next *Connections* unit could serve more broadly within the congregation or community. Host the committee at an in-home dessert, and think together how *Connections* could help strengthen your new members, start a small group ministry or assist in drawing visitors into your community of faith.



Growing Together This final devotional time will be an experience in prayer surrounded by silence. To prepare for the experience, sing or speak the first verse of the hymn “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence,” (ELW 490).

**Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
And with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly-minded,
For with blessing in his hand
Christ our God to earth descending
Comes full homage to demand.**

Talk about the meaning of this hymn verse and the value of silence in your habits of praying, using some of these questions:

- What are some reasons for your “silence before God”?
- Are you afraid of silence? Explain the reasons for your answer.
- How is silence a welcome, even spiritual, part of your daily life?
- What happens to you after longer periods of silence?
- What would be the benefit of surrounding the reading of Scripture, or the praying of prayers, with a pool of silence before, after and between sections?

Spend time in silence now, following your leader’s directions. Breathe more slowly, and allow your body to relax. Be patient with any nervousness or discomfort with silence. Bring yourself to a quiet sense of God’s presence, God’s intent and God’s blessings in your life.

Connecting With Scriptures

Read and pray these chapters of the Bible as one way to say Amen! to this unit’s experiences with prayer.

Read John 16.

1 “A little while and you will not see me,” Jesus says. How does the Spirit guide you into truth?

2 What do you still hesitate to pray to God about? How is your prayer life changing?

Ask
and you will
receive,
so that your
joy
may be
complete.

Read Romans 11 and 12.

1 What is the greatest evil? In what ways is the mind, the power and the glory of God even greater?

2 How can you believe God will deliver you from evil when Paul says, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil”?

For
from God
and
through God
and
to God
are all things.

Read Psalm 27.

1 How do you perceive evil to be assailing you?

2 What does it mean to wait for the Lord ... and to say “Amen!”?

Wait for the Lord;
be strong,
and let your heart
take courage;
wait for the Lord!

Using Other Resources

Finally, mark this, that you must always speak the Amen firmly. Never doubt that God in mercy will surely hear you and say “Yes” to your prayers. Never think that you are kneeling or standing alone; rather think that the whole of Christendom, all devout Christians, are standing there beside you and you are standing among them in a common, united petition which God cannot disdain. Do not leave your prayer without having said or thought, “Very well, God has heard my prayer; this I know as a certainty and a truth.”

From *A Simple Way to Pray*, by Martin Luther, page 195.

Connections: Faith and Life

Unit Three Living Spiritually

The Lord's Prayer

Participant Resource

Authors

Norma Cook Everist

Nelvin Vos

Editorial Team

Bob Sitze

Christine E. Weiser

Carol Weiser

Advisory Team

Norma Cook Everist

Sally Simmel

Bob Sitze

Nelvin Vos

Carol Weiser

Design

Kathryn Brewer

Illustration

Joe van Severen

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Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session.

Participants may read this online before they gather

for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group.

Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication.

Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.

Use the material in this section of the participant resource to begin the session. The activity described there provides an opportunity for group members to be reacquainted in an enjoyable way.

Introduce the activity by noting some of your thoughts about the importance of names to people, perhaps connecting to participants' lives with an anecdote from your own life.

Have participants pair with persons they know less well. Ask members of the pairs to introduce themselves to each other, using the questions in the participant resource.

Ask the pairs to rejoin the group and have each person introduce his or her partner, telling a bit about the other person's full name. Allow about a minute for each introduction. As a whole group discuss the question, "Why are names important?"

Session One

To Pray Is to Act

Prayer and Spirituality The Introduction and The First Petition of the Lord's Prayer

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Understand the relationship of prayer to spiritual growth.
- Remember that prayer provides the foundation of our daily lives.
- Face the fears and doubts each of us has about prayer and praying.
- Hold in awe how prayer is our communication with God.
- Pray more frequently and more fully.
- Expand the names for and ways of addressing God in prayer.

Introduction

In the two catechisms, Luther explores the depths of our relationship with God. This unit focuses on one element of that relationship — prayer — and on the Lord's Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer is probably the most familiar prayer for all Christians. It is prayed at nearly every worship service; it is used at ecumenical and even some secular gatherings. It is also one of the richest of all prayers for believers. It is the foundation of our growing in faith. This unit will help participants take a fresh look at this wonderful prayer and come to appreciate all it offers.

Special Note

The subject of the Lord's Prayer is enclosed within the wider matter of prayer itself. You will find in these six sessions more than enough material to examine either subject at great depth, and with great personal meaning for participants. In each of the first three sessions you will find a special segment, "Exploring the Meaning of Prayer." This material consists of selected writings about prayer and helpful questions for personal meditation or group discussion. You can insert parts of this segment into the session as you wish, or consider using the entire segment as an enrichment time for participants. This option is particularly well-suited for prayer retreats, extended courses and between-session classes.



Beginning Where We Are

The purpose of this activity is to sharpen and open up participants' understanding of spirituality and prayer. In the list of descriptions of spirituality, no one option is more correct than another. Each option points to a slightly different dimension of spirituality.

Several terms are used in this unit: spirituality, spiritual growth and spiritual. Use the term which you and the group find most meaningful and least confusing. The important matter is to recognize that prayer is essential for being in ministry in the world. Spirituality is centered in, but not limited to, prayer.

Since each of the descriptions is a perspective on spirituality, it is important that participants explore each of the options. Ask participants to read the opening paragraphs in this section, then place a check mark next to the definition that most closely fits their personal understanding of spirituality.

Allow about a minute for this. The participants should make the choice quickly and not spend a lot of time on it.

Help participants feel at ease with the questions by stressing that this is a snapshot of themselves, not the total picture. They need not think too hard about which option they choose. There are no right or wrong answers. Sometimes people believe others to be more spiritual than themselves, or judge others who express their spirituality differently. This is simply a way to appreciate varieties of spirituality and to listen to and give thanks for such variety.

Ask all who selected the first description to go to a designated corner of (or place in) the room. Designate corners (or places) for each of the other descriptions, and ask participants to go to those places with others who chose the same description.

As people move to different corners of the room, watch to see if there are corners with only one person. If so, you or your co-leader could join that person for the discussion.

Have participants ask others in their group why they made the selection they did and to talk about their view of spirituality. Allow about five minutes for this conversation, then, while remaining in these places of the room, each group can summarize its discussion briefly for the other groups. What similarities and differences did each group find among its members? What similarities and differences are there among the groups?

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating. *The Small Catechism* section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.



Connecting With Daily Life

What's in a Name?

Our being named and called by our name(s) is an important element in our self-identification — even our self-worth. In the Lord's Prayer, we are reminded of both God's name(s) and our own. Because we derive all of our blessings from God's own creating hand, our names, too, are a sign of God's blessing. Our given names — our "Christian" names — come to us with the meaning of the lives of those who named us.

There are many names for God in Scripture. By calling forth God's name(s), we ask and answer questions such as, "Who, then, is God?" In our addressing God by name, we bring honor to God and find in God both awesome power and gracious love.

This learning experience invites participants to expand their concepts of God and God's activity in the world by moving away from exclusively male pronouns for God to nouns and verbs of Scripture that encompass God's nature more fully. Use the questions in the participant resource to talk in pairs about the names and tones of voice people use to address them and about how the way we name God affects our perceptions of and relationship with God.

Exploring the Meaning of Prayer

This segment occurs in the first three sessions of this unit, and provides you with the opportunity to delve deeper into the matter of prayer itself. Like spirituality, prayer means different things to different people. Its importance cannot be overestimated in daily living.

Ask participants to read the quotations describing prayer in the participant resource and to select the one that most nearly matches their perspective on prayer at this moment.

Ask participants in the small groups to reflect quietly on the past week and to identify a particular incident in which they prayed from the perspective of the meaning they selected. Then have them talk about this incident and prayer in the group.



Connecting With the Faith



Experiencing Until Next Time

Have each participant identify someone to think about in terms of the questions listed. Encourage them to pray for that person at least twice during the week, and to remember the time, place and circumstances of that time of prayer.



Growing Together

Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time

which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session.

The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Connecting With Scriptures

The Psalms are poetry — the song book of the Hebrew people. As you read or pray psalms, you feel the poetry, not in rhyme or the rhythm with which many of us are familiar, but in the poetry of parallelism. When the psalm-writer repeats a phrase, watch for it. You may hear parallelism expressed in one of three ways:

- **Analogous. Almost the same thought is expressed in different words (the most often used type). An example is Psalm 5:8: “Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness. ... make your way straight before me.”**
- **Progressive. The thought is repeated, but this time enlarged or deepened. An example is Psalm 5:1: “Give ear to my words, O Lord; give heed to my sighing.”**
- **Antithetical. One hears an echo, but this time it is the opposite of the first phrase. An example is Psalm 3:5: “I lie down and sleep; I wake again. ...”**

If you will use this section as an additional activity, you might consider exploring Psalm 121, which uses all three of these parallelisms in an easily identifiable way.

Session Two

God's Will and Grace

Power and Control The Second and Third Petitions of the Lord's Prayer

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Examine more deeply why they pray.
- Understand more fully God's will and the Kingdom of God.
- Identify and articulate world views they hold.
- Explore the various world views that influence their understanding of the connections between faith and life.
- Appreciate world views not their own.
- Find ways in which to act in the light of their personal world view.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.

Beginning Where We Are

When all participants have arrived, ask them to talk about the individuals they kept in mind during the last week (as suggested in last session's "Experiencing until Next Time"). Spend a few minutes talking about the experience, using the questions in the participant resource.

Connecting With the Faith

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating. *The Small Catechism* section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.



Connecting With Daily Life

World Views

The major content of this section is an exploration of the various world views as H. Richard Niebuhr described them in his book *Christ and Culture*. Niebuhr's approach is an excellent way to compare and contrast the various relationships between Christ and culture, and to recognize one's own views of these relationships. Niebuhr's original thoughts were summarized as "Five Answers to the Enduring Question of the Relationship Between Christ and Culture." For the purposes of this session, that idea has been summarized into the typology shown in the chart on pages 10 and 11.

Ask participants to read the descriptions of the five world views carefully. Ask them to think about what each means and how each might be expressed in someone's perspective on Christian life and the world.

With participants, review the participant resource example of the approach to television as a cultural medium, from the perspective of each of the world views. Talk with them about their understanding of each of the views. Ask them to circle the world view type that comes closest to describing their own view of television. Remind participants that this is not a debate about a "Christian view" of television, but an easily understood example of various world views regarding this familiar element of contemporary culture.

Participants might also focus on another element of contemporary society of their choosing. The 'World Views' Chart which follows adds additional detail to Niebuhr's insight. You might provide participants with copies of this, too.

The Lutheran Church most generally fits Type 4, but one may find individuals holding all five world views in any given congregation.

The World View of Chris Kline

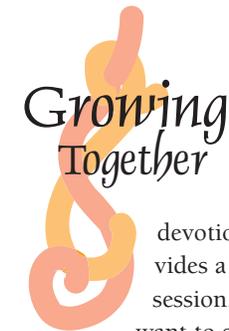
Save time to consider in some depth how participants' own world views can be summarized in these five types.



Experiencing Until Next Time

Highlight the suggestions given in this section in the participant resource. Suggest that participants might want to pair with another participant to attend or watch a session of a governing body such as those suggested in the participant resource.

Inform participants about the workplace visit scheduled for the next session. Give all the details and arrangements.



Growing Together

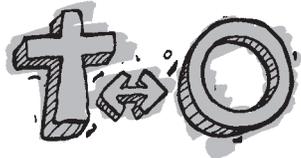
Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session. The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Connecting With Scriptures

Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John's Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use "Connecting with Scriptures."

World Views



Type/Name

1. Opposition

2. Agreement

3. Fulfillment

4. Tension

5. Conversion

Description

Christ *Against* Culture

Christ *In* Culture

Christ *Above* Culture

Christ and Culture *in Paradox*

Christ the *Transformer* of Culture

Role of Christ and Christians

Jesus is lawgiver. Christians judge the world and avoid it.

Christ is the great enlightener and educator. Christians accommodate to the world in order to harmonize Christ and culture.

Jesus is Lord. Jesus fulfills the Law. Christians obey God, are good persons, do acts of Christian love.

God is gracious through Christ. Forgiven Christians are to face the world, living as sinners and saints.

Christ is Redeemer, Helper. Christians live with people in their distress and help change their condition.

Culture Is...

Culture is inherently evil — to be avoided.

There is no great tension between Christ and culture. Culture needs to be inspired and improved.

Culture is part of God's creation. God is greater than culture.

Human beings are sinful and live in God's carefully created but now sinful world.

Good nature has become corrupted. Hopeful of change in culture.

Problems

Christians can't totally withdraw from culture. Difficult to discern the actual lines between Christ's holiness and the world's sinfulness, and between me and others.

The radical nature of sin is lost. Recasting of Jesus to make him more acceptable. One can "sell out" or be co-opted.

Judging or grading of Christians is based on good works. Institutionalization of Christ and gospel.

There is ambiguity in living paradoxically. Although poised for action, Christians can become culturally conservative.

Christians become discouraged when culture does not change, or when new problems arise.

Contributions

Monasticism, in turning away from the world, became one of the great conservers and transmitters of culture.

Christians influence the whole world, not just a small band of people like them.

The good works Christians do as they move toward God also affect the world positively.

Christians are able to see the world clearly, with all its problems, yet free to act with power of forgiveness.

Christians have a deep involvement in the world, in helping ways.

Session Three

God Cares for Us

Bread and the Body

The Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Know where and when to pray: at all times and in all places.
- Explore how prayer becomes the warp and woof of their daily lives.
- Appreciate how God provides daily bread each day.
- Empathize with those who do not have enough daily bread.
- Find ways to respond to God's grace in giving them daily bread.
- Advocate for others who lack daily bread.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.

Beginning Where We Are

Take a few minutes now to talk about the past week. Invite participants to share events, concerns, learnings or other reflections from their daily lives. Ask especially about the world views they noticed as they attended or viewed meetings of governing boards or legislative bodies. What did they observe? What world views were expressed? What did participants notice about their own view of the world?

Ask participants to think about the past week and recall any event or incident that involved a justice issue. This might be a personal issue related to occupation, or a community or global issue such as racism, ecology or economics.

This question can elicit lively conversation. At its root can be the question of God's power and control: If God is all-powerful and in control, then why is there injustice? This conversation will continue the discussion of the second and third petitions and lead into this session's focus.

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating. *The Small Catechism* section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.

Connecting With the Faith



Connecting With Daily Life

Two activities are included in this section in the participant resource. If you will make a visit during this session, you may need to eliminate the second activity. If so, invite participants to read the activity and reflect on the questions after the session. They might do this with another *Connections* participant during the week.

Activity One: A Visit to a World of a Participant

Follow the information and suggestions in the introduction to this leader guide to arrange and prepare for the visit.

During the visit, help participants focus on the connections between faith and life. Some may be tempted to talk about easier subjects, especially since the visits offer so many conversation starters. The value of the visit is not just in being present in the host's world, but being present there in the company of the faith. Be sure to include the questions in the participant resource in the visit conversation.

The illustration in the participant resource suggests another form of visit — a media presentation that portrays the world of one of the group members. This option should be used only when that place is inaccessible, such as a retirement home in another state, and the reasons for “visiting” it are compelling (for example, the host spends considerable time there, or its location or situation afford an excellent connection to the subject of a session).

Activity Two: Seeing Gifts of Daily Bread in Daily Life

The procedure for this activity is described in the participant resource. Have participants read each of the scenarios, then select several to discuss in depth. Use the questions in the participant resource. Share reflections in the total group.



Experiencing Until Next Time

The suggestion in this section is that participants go to a food kitchen, homeless shelter or other facility for those in need and, if possible, spend some time working there. Encourage people to select a place now and perhaps arrange to go with another participant or a member of your congregation already engaged in this kind of volunteer service.



Growing Together

Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session. The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Connecting With Scriptures

Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John's Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use “Connecting with Scriptures.”

Session Four

Making Excuses

Living and Forgiving

The Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- **Acknowledge their deep need for forgiveness.**
- **Know God as the God of forgiveness.**
- **Recognize how difficult it is to give and to accept forgiveness.**
- **Feel release as they experience freedom in Christ.**
- **Be able to forgive more fully and more often.**
- **Be able to discern and talk about the complex issues of relationships in films and plays in regard to forgiveness**

Preparing for the Session

The major activity in this session is viewing a film or local play.

Inform participants of an anticipated extension of the session time. You might want to limit the activities in this session to a very brief review of the focus of the session, the showing of the film and the discussion following the experience. Encourage participants to read through the rest of the material in their participant resource before the next session.

This session may be a good one to which guests or prospective group members are invited. The theme — forgiveness — is close to most Christians' daily experience.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.



When all have arrived, invite several participants to tell about their experience in a food pantry or homeless shelter. Use the questions in the participant resource to engage everyone in the conversation.

Introduce the session's focus by reading the words of the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer. Ask, "Which do you think is harder, forgiving someone else or accepting forgiveness from another person?"

Ask participants to write down the names of three persons with whom they are intimately connected. These might be family members, coworkers, friends, or neighbors. Encourage them to name persons from three different areas of their life.

Read the questions in the participant resource, then ask participants to jot down their responses in the space provided. Have participants share their responses in pairs or groups of three.

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating. *The Small Catechism* section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.



Connecting With the Faith

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.



Connecting With Daily Life

A number of films are suggested in the Introduction of the Leader Guide and the procedures for this section are suggested in the participant resource. Before viewing the film, go over the questions listed in the participant resource. Note any particular issues or themes that you and your co-leader have identified as important to the focus of this session or other faith-life connections. Don't give details about the film that would spoil the film for those who have never seen it.

If possible, you and your co-leader should watch the film at least once before the session. Plan together anything you want to highlight.

After the film, take about 30 minutes to talk about it, using the questions in the participant resource as a guide.



Experiencing Until Next Time

Use the directions in the participant resource. The purpose of this activity is to give participants a tangible experience in the act of forgiving and to recognize in it God's forgiveness.



Growing Together

Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session.

The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Connecting With Scriptures

Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John's Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use "Connecting with Scriptures."

Session Five

Tempted and Tried

Dealing With Dilemmas

The Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Understand the meaning of temptation.
- Explore how prayer helps them to meet temptation.
- Feel the power and influence of temptation.
- Trust that God will be with them even in temptation.
- Face temptation with God's help.
- Grow in faith as they place their lives in God's hands.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.

Beginning Where We Are

After all have arrived, invite participants to talk about the past week. What experiences did they have with forgiveness, both offering it and receiving it?

Invite those who wish to do so to tell about their experience of sending a message concerning forgiveness. They need not talk about the content or the person, just the feelings and thoughts they had when they prepared the message. How did they discern whether or not to send the message?

Have participants turn to the questions in this section of the participant resource and jot down some notes in response to the questions. Invite them to talk about their responses with one other person.

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating.

The Small Catechism section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.

Connecting With the Faith



Connecting With Daily Life

Two activities are suggested for this part of the session. One of these is a visit. If you plan to go on the visit during your usual meeting period, you may have time only for the opening activities, which you can accomplish at the visit site before taking the tour.

If the visit is scheduled for another time, use the activity below. You may also want to augment the session with a Bible study using the material in *Connecting With Scriptures* from Session Three or Session Four.

Activity One: Noticing Ordinary, Everyday Temptations

Summarize the instructions in the participant resource for this activity. Encourage participants to add words to the list in the participant resource. Especially encourage them to have fun with the activity.

Participants may get off track here, looking for evidences of sins instead of evidences of temptation. In this activity you are not looking for evil or sin, but places where readers are invited to engage in sin. As you listen to participant conversations during the activity, point out this subtle difference.

Give participants about 10 minutes to collect examples, then have them share their findings in small groups or in the total group. If there is time, make a montage (or several) of the items by cutting out and pasting together on posterboard the clippings that cluster around various kinds of temptation.

Activity Two: A Visit to a World of a Participant

Follow the suggestions in the participant resource for this visit. Review with participants the purpose of the visits (see *Leader Guide*, Unit Three, Session Three). After the visit, talk about the questions in the participant resource.

Allow some time for this conversation, then ask, “What are the deep evils here?” In the discussion of the Lord’s Prayer, this question may elicit significant connections. The question offers an opportunity for discussing systemic evils. Systemic sins are assumptions built into a culture which operate over time unquestioned, for example systemic racism, sexism and classism. Until such systemic sin is challenged, it keeps both oppressor and oppressed in bondage.

In *The Large Catechism*, Luther again and again speaks of sin, death and the devil. This is Luther’s way of saying that evil is more than personal immorality; it is our bondage to the evil in the structures of society — an evil that is greater than any one person.

Invite the host to describe some of the compromises in which he or she is trapped. This lets the group know that such situations are not uncommon. Luther understood this all too well. He was battling systemic evil in the church itself.

The evil from which we ask to be delivered in the next petition may be much more intense than the trials from which we ask to be saved. You and the participants may easily be caught in a discussion of temptations to immorality, which are destructive enough in them-

selves, but which may not compare to the death that systemic evil can bring to a world.

This discussion of evil brings a realistic approach to social concerns. Instead of starting with global issues (hunger, racism, war and peace), the visits start with the local situation and examine the ethical dilemmas of that situation. You and the other participants begin by hearing the host’s first-person perception of a problem rather than a theoretical analysis. Sometimes you will see how the problem stems from difficulties in the company, community, nation or world. Most local problems have global connections. All have connections with the cosmic powers of sin, death and the devil.



Experiencing Until Next Time

Take a few minutes to go over this section with participants. Note that this is a very personal, reflective activity. Assure them that they will not be asked to share any of their reflections in the group. Encourage them to make the activity part of their daily routine. Invite comments and questions.



Growing Together

Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session. The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Connecting With Scriptures

Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John’s Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use “Connecting with Scriptures.”

Session Six

Saying Amen to God and One Another

Evil – D(evil) – Live The Seventh Petition, the Doxology and Amen of the Lord’s Prayer

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Recognize sin and systemic evil.
- Integrate the meaning of evil with the understanding of the Doxology and Amen of the Lord’s Prayer.
- Accept joyfully the fact that all is in God’s hands.
- Trust joyfully that their lives are in God’s hands.
- Hold in awe the gift of silence.
- Pray Amen to God, “yes, it shall be so.”

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.

Beginning Where We Are

When all participants have arrived, ask them to talk about the visit they made last session and their reflections on it since then. Move to shared reflection on the questions in the participant resource.

Continue with the material on common expressions about the devil. Point out those in the participant resource, then ask for other sayings or colloquialisms. In the total group, talk about the questions in the participant resource.

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating. *The Small Catechism* section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.

Connecting With the Faith

Connecting With Daily Life

Your Situation

Using the paragraph and questions in the participant resource, invite people to think about situations in their own lives. From among the participants invite someone in the group to tell his or her story and turn it into a role play.

Ask the person telling the story to describe the situation in as much detail as possible (without revealing names or confidential information). Invite other participants to act out the story. (Participants should be invited, not coaxed, to take part in the role-play.) The person telling the story should not be one of the “actors,” but help the participants understand the dimensions of the story and how they might be played out. After the role-play, ask the storyteller to respond and others to contribute their observations, feelings and insights. Allow time (at least 20 minutes) for the discussion following the role-play.

A Situation Study

The participant resource also includes an extensive description of a situation from daily life. You can engage in this situation study with the material in the participant resource, or adapt what you read to fit a real-life situation — perhaps one that comes from a participant’s own life.

Read the situation to participants and ask for questions and comments. The participant resource provides space for adding thoughts about the dilemmas and evil that are evident in this situation, as well as the space for reflecting on similar situations.

This optional storytelling and role-play addresses both personal sin and systemic evil. Often we concentrate so much on personal sin that systemic evil is ignored. For example, we are taught to confess the thoughts, words and deeds which we have done and left undone, but we are taught to tolerate the evils of nation, church, company or community, because to be too critical of these would be disloyal or unpatriotic.

Experiencing Until Next Time

The activities suggested in this section of the participant resource provide a way for *Connections* participants to share their experiences with other members of the congregation. As you continue with the next *Connections* unit, this may draw new members to the group. Be open to them. Or, it may spark the formation of a new *Connections* group. Think of people and places for such a group and help facilitate its formation.

Growing Together

1. After a few minutes of preliminary discussion of items in the participant resource, dim the lights in the room slightly and after a few moments of silence offer these thoughts and directions:

Why is it that many of us fear the pause — the silence — in our lives? We are often embarrassed by it, we fidget and twist in our too-tight mental underwear because we have never learned to see silence as other than nothingness. We live with a fear of gaps.

In the next few minutes we will use the blessing of silence as a way of praying together. Although our usual experience of group prayer occurs with spoken words, or in singing together the prayers we find in hymns, during this time together we will be joined together in silence as well.

2. Direct participants to relax and breathe deeply for a few moments. They can close their eyes, look out a window or focus their eyes on a particular spot in the room.

3. The experience will consist of your offering “prayer prompts,” including those of your own choosing and the short readings here, to which participants can join themselves through a period of silent prayer or thought.

4. Possible readings and prompts include:

- **How rare to find a soul still enough to hear God speak.** (Attributed to Fenéln, a French spiritual leader)
- **We have a tendency to hang up the phone after we talk to God. Don't just hang up when you're done talking. Stay on the line so God can speak to you.** (From *Receptive Prayer*, by Grace Adolphsen Brame, as quoted in *The Lutheran*, May 1992, page 14.)
- **To pray means to open your hands before God. It means slowly relaxing the tension which squeezes your hands together. Above all, prayer is a way of life which allows you to find a stillness in the midst of the world where you open your hands to God's promises.** (From *With Open Hands*, by Henri Nouwen, page 154.)
- **Let us pray for:**
 - Quiet times in the middle of busy days
 - Grace under pressure
 - Courage to withstand temptation
 - Forgiveness for imagined inferiorities
 - A grateful attitude about life
 - Wisdom and cunning to battle evil
 - Joy and humor in ordinary things
 - Challenges that are new and bold
- **Let us bless God for:**
 - The gift of constant forgiveness
 - Surprising grace from others
 - People who love us undeservedly
 - This moment, this day, this week
 - Faithfulness of others around us
 - People who encourage our growth

5. Close this period of time with the Lord's Prayer, in this format: You pray each section or petition, participants repeat that section or petition, you restate the words once again, and allow moments of silence before repeating the process on the next section or petition.

When the Lord's Prayer is finished, allow a few more moments of silence before dismissing group members quietly. If there is time, celebrate the experiences you shared together during this unit.

Remind participants of the Scripture passages at the end of the session, and their utility as end-of-unit experiences. This unit concludes by challenging evil and considering God's almighty power in the face of evil. These passages help cement that reality into participants' lives.

The reading of John, Romans and the Psalms will continue in Unit Four.

Connecting With Scriptures

Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John's Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use “Connecting with Scriptures.”



Living Freely

Participant Resource

*Norma Cook Everist
Nelvin Vos*



Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Unit Four
The Sacraments



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General Introduction

Where is God, anyway? And what exactly is God doing?

Many of us as children probably thought that God was located about three feet above the altar or in some other spot in the church building. The writer of Psalm 139 discovered that God was everywhere. “If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me” (verses 9-10).

By taking part in a *Connections* group, you have also begun a process of discovery. *Connections* is about discovery: of God, of God’s worlds and of God’s people.

Connections: Faith and Life unfolds the many worlds God is creating and redeeming. It is a discovery of God at work in the world, especially in your life and in the lives of others who participate. It is an experience in getting to know God better.

There’s a saying that you don’t really know people until you have visited them where they live. In your *Connections* group, you will actually visit members of the group in their homes, in their places of work, in the neighborhoods in which they live or in their places of leisure or recreation. You will see people in new ways as you see how they live and relate to others in the worlds God is creating and redeeming for them.

Through *Connections*, you will get to know yourself better and begin to recognize and understand how your life is a ministry. You will also come to a fresh and better understanding of the faith as you observe how it relates to your occupation, your place of recreation, your community and your home. The familiar words of the Lord’s Prayer and the Eucharist will be explored as they relate to your everyday world. The Ten Commandments and the Apostles’ Creed will be studied and applied to the decisions you make and to the life-and-death issues you face.

And you will get to know Martin Luther better. As you study *The Large Catechism* and discuss it in the worlds you visit, you will observe how he dealt with his worlds when he came face to face with God. You will recognize that his world was very different from yours today, and yet the core issues remain the same.



About This Book

This participant resource contains questions, highlights from Luther's writings, session references and notes. It is not a textbook as such, but rather a collection of readings and learning activities with some space for your writings and reflections. The participant resource is where you can think about and record your experiences. In addition to containing the session material, the participant resource is a private place where you can insert anything you wish, in effect creating your own resource.

So let the discovery begin – the discovery of God, of God's worlds and of yourself in growth and prayer.

Introduction

Connections is about the relationship between faith and life. The real curriculum for this experience is life: your life and the lives of others in the group. *Connections* focuses on your day-to-day experiences: your joys, concerns, activities and issues. The purpose is to help you and other participants notice the worlds God is creating, saving and making holy all around you.

If daily life is the curriculum for *Connections*, then one way to think about how you might learn and relearn that curriculum is in the matter of forgiveness. The matters of your being forgiven and of your capacity to forgive are expressed in the sacraments: Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar. For those baptized as infants, the process has a “small beginning” at the time of Baptism. For all Christians, the matter of forgiveness continues throughout life as the life-enhancing cycle of repentance, confession and forgiveness works to free us from basic selfishness. In the Sacrament of the Altar (Holy Communion) that forgiveness is brought to our bodies in the body and blood of Christ, making tangible what is essential for the Christian life.

The theme of Unit Four is “Living Freely,” which captures the essence of the several parts of Luther's catechisms included in this unit. Luther characterizes the matter this way:

Christ has set us free, not from some human slavery or tyrannical authority, but from the eternal wrath of God. Where? In the conscience. This is where our freedom comes to a halt; it goes no further. For Christ has set us free, not for a political freedom or a freedom of the flesh but for a theological or spiritual freedom. Our conscience is free and joyful, unafraid of the wrath to come (Matthew 3:7). This is the most genuine freedom; it is immeasurable. For who can express what a great gift it is for someone to be able to declare for certain that God neither is nor ever will be wrathful, but will forever be a gracious and merciful Father for the sake of Christ? (*From The Book of Concord, page 272.*)

In this unit you will engage in activities like reading and discussing, imagining, personal sharing and writing. You will participate in at least one off-site visit — a chance to see the daily worlds of members of your group. Above all, you will find new voices in your life, new ways to see God acting in your worlds and new directions for your sense of mission.

And in all these activities you will meet God, working alongside you in the worlds you inhabit. In the process of forgiveness begun in Baptism, you will find God there with you, and draw strength from the knowledge that God stays with you throughout each day.

Unit Four *Living Freely* The Sacraments



Session One

A New Beginning for Life

Living Into Our Baptism The Sacrament of Holy Baptism

Going to the Heart of the Matter

In this session, we explore the sacrament of Holy Baptism.

Each of us seeks a new beginning every day — a fresh start and a new outlook. It may be a new job, a new commitment to health or maybe just a more positive attitude. What we hope is that from even the smallest of beginnings will come something important.

In reality, God provides all new beginnings: the ones that happen once and for all time and those that occur every day of our lives. The most basic beginning we can find is a right relationship with our God. And in Baptism, God comes to us with a gift. Because of Jesus, we are forgiven, named, called and sent.

Remembering the gift of our Baptism each day reminds us that in Baptism we are also given a new identity: We are called by name. We are baptized into the name of Jesus Christ and we carry this family name in our very being. From what seems like a small start (water and Word, and a new name) come the magnificent blessings of God. We become part of a community: the church of Jesus Christ. We are given a lifelong commission: to bring our lives into line with God's will, to bring glory to God in everything we do and to get done in the world what God wants done. We are marked with the cross of Christ forever.

Getting Acquainted



WE ARE BAPTIZED INTO THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST AND WE CARRY THIS "FAMILY NAME" INTO OUR VERY BEING.

Choose as a partner someone in the group whom you know less well. Ask each other the following:

- What is your full name?
- What do you know about the meaning or history of your family name?
- Have you ever changed your name? Why?
- What other names (such as a nickname) do you carry?
- What does it mean that your name is "Christian"?

After spending sufficient time to have a brief, but meaningful, conversation, rejoin the group. Introduce your partner to the group by sharing the full name of your partner and your partner's response to one of the questions.

Beginning Where We Are

Chart some places in life where you got your start — situations, events or places where some significant life directions first began.

How I Got My Start

The situation or event

The people who helped

My feelings about the event

Relationships

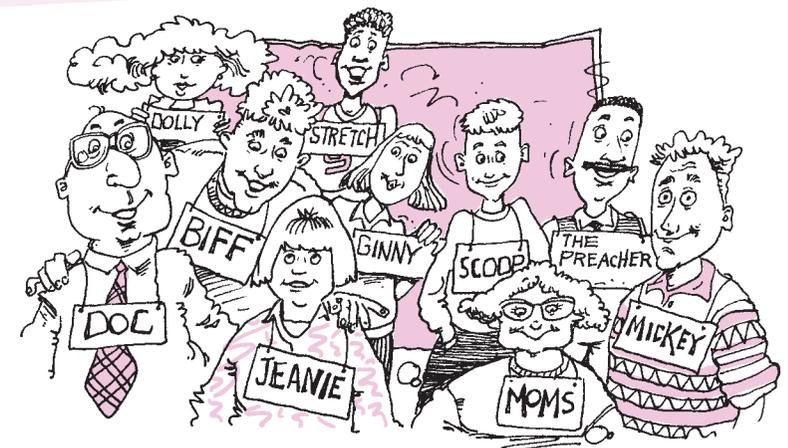
Some of my gifts

Work or profession

Hobby or interest

Road to recovery

Relationship with God



Small Catechism

What is baptism?

Baptism is not simply plain water. Instead it is water enclosed in God's command and connected with God's Word.

What then is this Word of God?

Where our LORD Christ says in Matthew 28[:19], "Go into all the world, teach all nations, and baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

What gifts or benefits does baptism grant?

It brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it, as the words and promise of God declare.

What are these words and promise of God?

Where our LORD Christ says in Mark 16[:16], "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be damned."

Large Catechism (Excerpt Summary)

In our common Christian teaching we have two sacraments. In Baptism we are first received into the Christian community. Christ commands in Matthew 28:19, "Go into all the world, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." In Mark 16:16 he promises, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned."

Baptism is not a human plaything, but is instituted by God. We are not to regard it as an indifferent matter, then, like putting on a new red coat. No matter how external it may be, here stand God's Word and command which have instituted, established, and confirmed Baptism. So the words read, "Go, baptize," not in your name but

"in God's name."

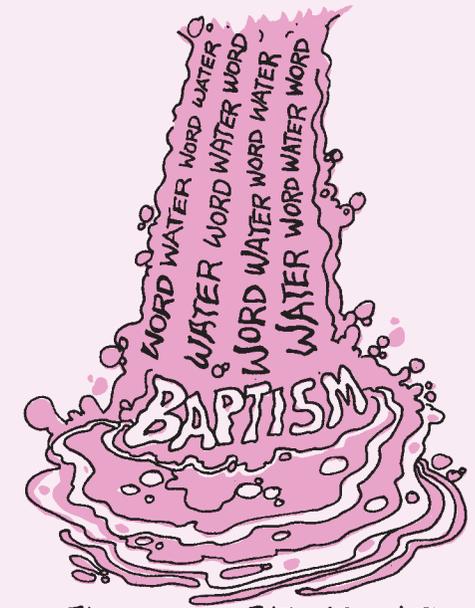
What is Baptism? It is not simply common water, but water comprehended in God's Word and commandment and sanctified by them. When the Word is added to the element, it becomes a sacrament, that is, a holy, divine thing and sign. The two, the Word and the water, must by no means be separated from each other.

The power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose of Baptism is to save. To be saved is nothing else than to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil and to enter into the kingdom of Christ and to live with him forever.

Faith must have something to believe, something to which it may cling and upon which it may stand. Thus faith clings to the water and believes it to be Baptism in which there is sheer salvation and life.

Baptism is not our work but God's. Baptized in the name of God, you may receive in the water the promised salvation. This the hand cannot do nor the body, but the heart must believe it. Baptism is not a work which we do, but is a treasure which God gives us and faith grasps, just as the Lord Christ upon the cross is not a work but a treasure comprehended and offered to us in the Word and received by faith.

In Baptism, therefore, Christians have enough to study and to practice all their lives. To appreciate and use Baptism aright, we must draw strength from it when our sins or conscience oppress us, and we must retort, "But I am baptized! And if I am baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and



**THE WORD AND THE WATER MUST
BY NO MEANS BE SEPARATED
FROM EACH OTHER.**

body." No greater jewel, therefore, can adorn our body and soul than Baptism, which no other kind of life on earth can acquire.

Reflection Questions

1 Think about baptisms you have witnessed. What is the meaning of these baptisms for the one baptized and for the faith community?

2 What do you believe about salvation and how it is connected to Baptism?

3 Because we baptize not in the name of one particular church but in God's name, how does Baptism unite the global Christian family?

Activity One: From Small Beginnings

The splash of Baptism makes ripples in people's lives, changing the way people think and act. One way to bring home the

realities of Baptism is to visit a place of Baptism or examine the items used to baptize. Depending on when your group meets, you can:

- **Gather with your group around your church's baptismal font.**
- **Participate together in a Baptism at worship services.**
- **Examine the items used in a baptismal event.**

At the Baptismal Font

Place one finger in the water, and notice the ripples. As you place your hand in the water, tell what you know about your baptismal service and one way you attempt to live your Baptism. With your group, recall stories of baptisms you have been part of. Talk about what motivated the Baptism, the significant people present, the special elements of the rite or what happened after the event. Or talk about questions like these:

- **What does it mean to be baptized?**
- **How do you recognize the connection between your Baptism and the resurrection of Jesus?**
- **In what ways do you recognize this connection in your workplace? With your family? Your friends?**
- **What happened in your life as a result of the "small beginning" of Baptism?**

As a way of reminding you of this time together, say the full name of the person on your right as you make the sign of the cross with water on the person's forehead.

Participating in Baptism

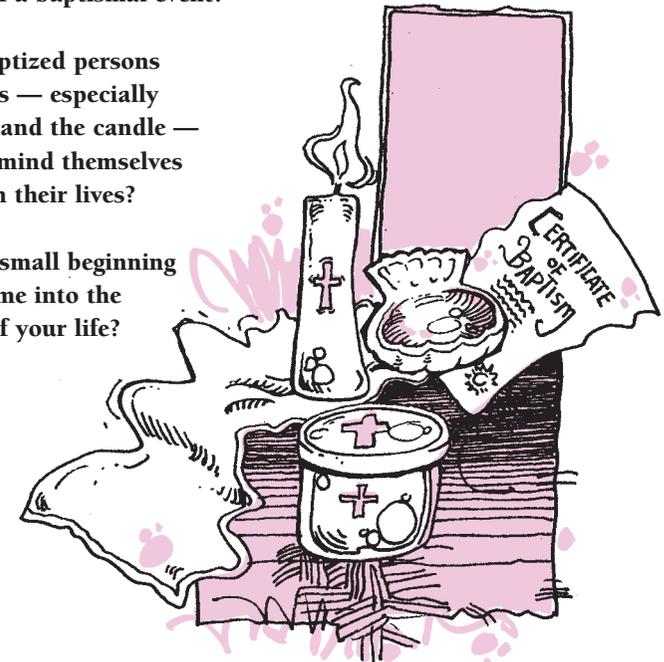
Attend a worship service together at which a Baptism will take place. Sit in a place where you can sense the emotions of the person being baptized, the family members and those who will officiate at the Baptism. Participate in the rite and spend a few moments with the baptized person or their family after the service.

At the conclusion of the service or at your next group meeting, recall what you noticed about this "small beginning" in the life of the person being baptized and others who participated. Recall how your own baptisms have affected your lives or talk about the questions in the previous section.

The Items of Baptism

Together, examine the items used in a Baptism at your church. They might include baptismal clothing, the baptismal napkin or towel, a baptismal candle, baptismal shell, baptismal certificate or the oil stock (containing the oil used to make the sign of the cross on the forehead of the baptized person). As you pass these items among members of your group, talk about your own baptisms, or discuss questions such as these:

- **What is it that makes these essentially ordinary items so special?**
- **What would it mean if really ordinary items like these were used as part of a baptismal event?**
- **How might baptized persons use these items — especially the certificate and the candle — as a way to remind themselves of this event in their lives?**
- **How does the small beginning of Baptism come into the ordinariness of your life?**



Activity Two: Reminding Us of Our Baptism

Think of the places you might put something that would remind you that you are a baptized member of God's family. It could be an out-of-the-way place like the inside of a locker, or an obvious place like a mirror in a bathroom, or a sticky note on your computer.

When you
wash your face
remember
your Baptism.

Martin Luther

While you are doing this, think about these questions:

- **When you look at this poster during the week, what will the poster help you remember?**
- **What will it help you feel?**
- **What will it help you do?**



Sing together the spiritual “Shall We Gather at the River?” (ELW 423). Read Mark 10:35-45 and reflect on these questions quietly.

- **Why was Jesus baptized?**
- **How does the statement “Not to be served, but to serve” describe Jesus? In what ways does it describe you?**
- **How is your Baptism connected to Christ's death and resurrection?**

The baptismal service in the Lutheran tradition includes the following statement: “We welcome you into the body of Christ and into the mission we share: join us in giving thanks and praise to God and bearing God's creative and redeeming word to all the world.” (From *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, page 231.)

Select one word or phrase from this statement and tell briefly what it means specifically in living your Baptism.

Pray together:

God, you have called us by name and called us by Christ's name. Come to us in fresh water again this day that we might remember once again what was once given us in the waters of Baptism. Help us to feel the presence of our brothers and sisters in Christ and to see the new creation you make in our daily worlds. Amen

Experiencing Until Next Time

Go out during the week alone to a place of water in your community — a river, pond or perhaps even an indoor fountain. As you look at the water, reflect on these questions:

- **How have people used water throughout the ages?**
- **How do you use water today?**
- **How does water enhance life, and how does it diminish life?**
- **What feelings — about life, about God, about yourself — does water bring to mind?**
- **In what ways is water a sign of God's activity?**

Connecting With Scriptures

Baptism's small beginning is really not all that small after all! The Scriptures tell how Baptism starts something important, though. Read and pray these sections of the Bible and reflect on how your own Baptism continues to be important in your life.

Read John 17.

1 How has Jesus' work connected you to God and to one another?

2 How did Jesus' Baptism connect him to us and reconnect us to life?

Read Romans 6.

1 When were you buried with Christ and when are you raised from the dead with Christ?

2 How does your Baptism free you to live with Christ and no longer be enslaved to sin?

I made your
name
known
to them.

Do you not know that
all of us
who have been
baptized
into Christ Jesus
were baptized
into his
death?

Read Psalm 98.

1 What new things is God doing in your life right now?

2 God has "remembered" God's steadfast love and faithfulness. How is Baptism and remembrance of Baptism a sign of God's victory?

to sing
to the Lord
a new song,
for God
has done
marvelous
things.

Using Other Resources

This understanding of Baptism is difficult to come by in a culture that sees it as a cute little cultural act at which a name is given, a white dress worn, and the grandparents are asked in for champagne breakfast. Baptism in its essence meant dying; for Christians in many ages it was the visible public break with the world, the break inviting trouble with the world.

From *The Hidden Discipline*, by **Martin Marty**, page 88.

Session Two

Freedom From Is Freedom For

Living Free The Sacrament of Holy Baptism

Going to the Heart of the Matter

In this session, we continue to explore the sacrament of Holy Baptism.

People sometimes wave their freedoms like a flag and wear them like a badge. We are proud of our “rights” and our “freedoms.” But Christian freedom, rooted in Baptism, is freer than all: freedom for life. Jesus’ death and resurrection free us for life, even under oppression.

When we think of Baptism, we recall joyful and cherubic faces. But that is only a surface effect, for at its heart, Baptism is a turbulent event. Underneath the gentle washing of water, God is working hard: snatching one more life from evil in order to claim it and to make it a part of the new creation in Christ. Some part of us — Luther calls it our sinful self — has to die, to be drowned. There, too, God is at work.

What God has done in Baptism, God continues to do each moment of our lives as we face temptations and difficult decisions. God has defeated the forces of evil. That does not mean that we have no more struggles. It does mean that, beginning with the life-giving waters of Baptism, Christ gives us faith and hope as we daily die to sin.

Daily repentance and freedom and newness of life — in such rhythms our daily lives move.

Beginning Where We Are

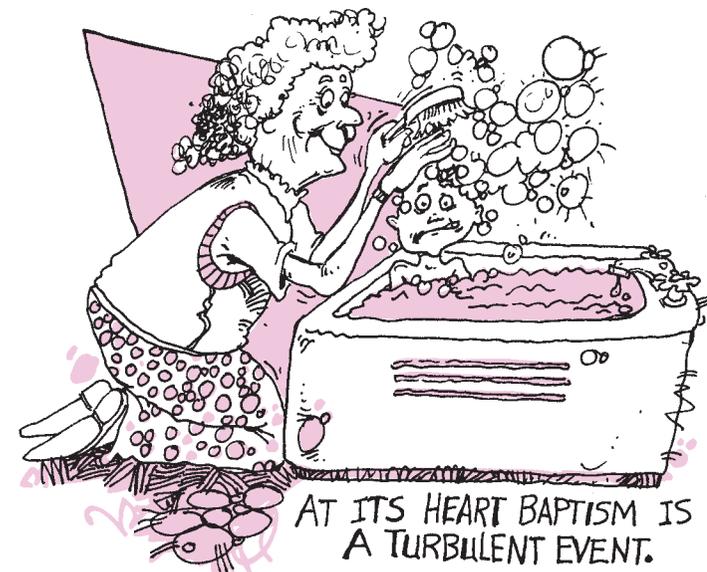
With another person, talk about the past week and your observations about water:

- How have people used water throughout the ages?

- How do you use water today?
- How does water enhance life, and how does it diminish life?
- What feelings — about life, about God, about yourself — does water bring to mind?
- In what ways is water a sign of God’s activity?

Talk about how the water of your Baptism has made you free:

- Think of a time when you felt free. How would you describe this experience?
- In what ways are you free? In what ways are you not free?
- What would have to be washed and scrubbed off of you for you to be really free?
- What in you would have to die in order for you to be free?



Connecting With the Faith

Small Catechism

How can water do such great things?

Clearly the water does not do it, but the Word of God, which is with and alongside the water, and faith, which trusts this Word of God in the water. For without the Word of God the water is plain water and not a baptism, but with the Word of God it is a baptism, that is, a grace-filled water of life and a “bath of the new birth in the Holy Spirit,” as St. Paul says to Titus in chapter 3[:5–8], “through the bath of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit, which he richly poured out over us through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that through that very grace we may be righteous and heirs in hope of eternal life. This is surely most certainly true.”

What then is the significance of such a baptism with water?

It signifies that the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily contrition and repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Where is this written?

St. Paul says in Romans 6[:4], “We were buried with Christ through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we, too, are to walk in a new life.”

Large Catechism (Excerpt Summary)

Do children also believe and is it right to baptize them? Everything depends upon the Word and commandment of God. My faith does not constitute Baptism but receives it. Even if infants did not believe — which, however, is not the case — still their Baptism would be valid and no one should rebaptize them. We bring children with the purpose and hope that they may believe, and

we pray God to grant them faith.

Being dipped under the water and emerging from it indicate the power and effect of

Baptism, which must continue in us our whole life long. Thus a Christian life is nothing else than a daily Baptism, once begun and ever continued. If you live in repentance, you are walking in Baptism, which not only announces new life but also produces, begins, and promotes it. Baptism remains forever. Even though we fall from it and sin, nevertheless we always have access to it. Repentance is nothing else than a return and approach to Baptism, to resume and practice what had earlier been begun but abandoned.

The ship does not founder. But it does happen that we slip and fall out of the ship. If anybody does fall out, that person should



immediately head for the ship and cling to it until he or she can climb aboard and sail on in it. Baptism is the daily garment which we are to wear all the time. If we wish to be Christians, we

must practice the work that makes us Christians. As we have once obtained forgiveness of sins in Baptism, so forgiveness remains day by day as long as we live.

Reflection Questions

- 1 When have you worried about your own faith or the faith of someone dear to you? How does Baptism give you comfort?
- 2 How does receiving the forgiveness of sins in Baptism free you for new life?
- 3 What could you say to someone who thinks infants should not be baptized because they are not mature enough to believe?

We bring children with the purpose and hope that they may believe, and we pray God to grant them faith.



Freedom From Is Freedom For

Check the pairs that characterize your experiences of sin and grace.

Freedom From Is Freedom For
Sin and Grace for me are more like...

<input type="checkbox"/> Being guilty	➔	Being forgiven
<input type="checkbox"/> Being in chains	➔	Being set free
<input type="checkbox"/> Being lost	➔	Being found
<input type="checkbox"/> Being dead	➔	Being alive
<input type="checkbox"/> Being torn apart	➔	Being whole
<input type="checkbox"/> Being _____	➔	Being _____

Miming Bondages

You and other *Connections* participants have been using words to explain bondage and freedom. In this activity, you will try some body movements and positions to express bondage. You might do this by using all or part of your body. For example, to mime the desire to have things, you might reach out in a grasping motion.

You are invited now to do a mime of a bondage. You may ask others to help you mime your bondages. Each person in the group who wishes to participate will take a turn to perform a mime. Do not tell the group what it is you are miming until after the group has considered the meaning of your actions or motions. Talk about the following:

- What is being portrayed in the mime?
- What feelings does it invoke in you?

Once you have mimed a variety of bondages, take time to think about how bondages can be broken. *Un-mime* each other's bondages by showing how to gain release from them. We cannot fully understand each other's bondage, nor can we release each other, but we can reach out in Christ in care to help each other break free.



Sing together the hymn "Amazing Grace" (ELW 779). Talk about especially meaningful phrases or times when the

hymn has had special significance for you. Read Romans 7:14-25 and Romans 8:1-9.

Reflect quietly on this question:
How do we help each other be free?

Pray together:

Gracious Lord, through water and the Spirit you have made us your own. You forgave us all our sins and brought us to newness of life. Continue to strengthen us with the Holy Spirit, and daily increase in us your gifts of grace: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord and the spirit of joy in your presence, through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Experiencing Until Next Time

Walk About – Talk About

Share your faith with one person during the week. Use ordinary language — the language of daily life. Find ways to help this person experience the grace and freedom of Christ.

Think about the ways in which you are free, not only in the political or economic senses of that term. Remember your Baptism sometime this week as a time when freedom really began for you. Find ways to affirm your freedoms and thank God for them this week.

Connecting With Scriptures

Read John 18.

1 When asked, “You are not also one of this man’s disciples, are you?” Peter replied, “I am not.” In what ways do you struggle with denial of Jesus in your life?

2 Judas betrayed Jesus, Peter denied Jesus and Pilot side-stepped his responsibility for Jesus. How are you using your baptismal freedom?

What is truth?

Read Romans 13.

1 You are not free from authority, from taxes or from civil law. How is God at work in those areas of life?

The night is far gone,
the day is near.
Let us then lay aside
the works of darkness
and put on
the armor of light...

Put on the
Lord Jesus
Christ.

Read Psalm 69.

1 Listen for the images of bondage: “I’m up to my neck in hot water,” “I’m sinking in mire,” “I’m being swallowed in the pit” and more. Which images fit your experience? What images would you add?

2 How does God free those who love God’s name, so that they can live?

The Lord hears
the needy,
and does not
despise
God’s own
that are
in bonds.

Using Other Resources

Freedom is, at its roots, not about options. At least in the Christian context, freedom is about love, what we love, how we love. Multiplicity of choices might in fact hinder love from having the context, the time, the room, the struggle requisite for growth and deepening.

From “Minding the Call,” by Elaine M. Pravallet, *Weavings*, Volume XI, No. 3, May/June 1990, pages 11-12.

A Christian is perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.
A Christian is perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.

From Martin Luther, “A Treatise on Christian Liberty,” *Three Treatises*, page 251.

Session Three

Eating and Intimacy

The Supper and Nourishment The Sacrament of the Altar

Going to the Heart of the Matter

In this session, we explore the Sacrament of the Altar.

We gather around the Lord's Table to be fed and strengthened by bread and wine, both derived from the essence of nature. The bread starts as grains of wheat scattered across the fields; the wine as thousands of individual grapes. Baking or fermentation

turns them into food that can be shared, broken, poured out. Bread and wine are symbols of the life of Christ given for us.

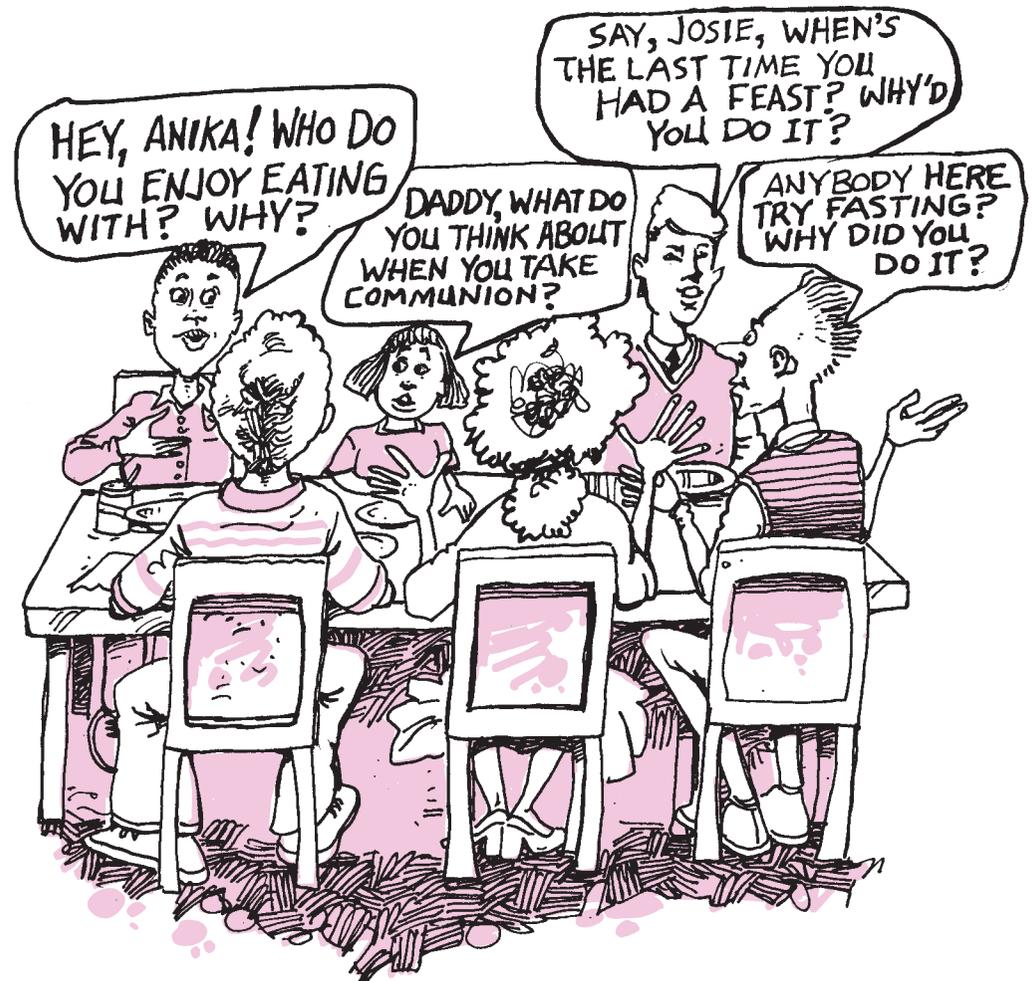
Eating is a sign of intimacy. Eating at the altar is the ultimate intimacy with Holy God and one another. Christ includes at his table those very different from one another — even estranged from each other — making possible an intimacy beyond anger, an incorporation beyond any human bond.

In the nourishment of the Lord's Supper, we are joined with Christ to bear his name in the world, and in turn, to give his body to the world. Our daily lives, filled with the bondage of sin and death, are made free again by Christ's love. The sacrament gives us worth and fills us. We are no longer empty. We are being totally loved.



Beginning Where We Are

With another person, talk about the past week. If you shared your faith with another, tell about the experience and how you felt. In what ways does sharing your faith help you feel free?



Connecting With the Faith

Small Catechism

What is the Sacrament of the Altar?

It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ himself for us Christians to eat and to drink.

Where is this written?

The holy evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and St. Paul write thus: “Our LORD Jesus Christ, on the night in which he was betrayed, took the bread, gave thanks, and broke it and gave it to his disciples and said, ‘Take; eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’

“In the same way he also took the cup after the supper, gave thanks, and gave it to them and said, ‘Take, and drink of it, all of you. This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ ”

Large Catechism (Excerpt Summary)

Everyone who wishes to be a Christian and go to this sacrament should be familiar with what it is, what its benefits are, and who is to receive it. The Sacrament of the Altar is the true body and blood of the Lord Christ in and under the bread and wine comprehended in God’s Word and connected with it.

With this Word you can strengthen your conscience and declare: “Let a hundred thousand devils, with all the fanatics rush

kinds of questions, for example, whether even a wicked priest can administer the sacrament. Even though a knave should receive or administer it, it is the true sacrament. For it is not founded on the holiness of people but on the Word of God. Christ does not say, “If you believe, or if you are worthy you receive my body and blood,” but, “Take, eat and drink, this is my body and blood, given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.”

We go to the sacrament because we receive there a great treasure, the forgiveness of sins. Christ bids me eat and drink in order that the sacrament may be mine. It is called food of the soul since it nourishes and strengthens. There are so many hindrances and temptations of the devil and the world that we often grow weary and faint, at times even stumble. The Lord’s Supper is given as a daily food and sustenance so that our faith may

For it is not founded on the holiness of people but on the Word of God.

forward and say, ‘How can bread and wine be Christ’s body and blood?’ Here we have Christ’s word, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ ‘Drink of it, all of you, this is the new covenant in my blood.’ Here we shall take our stand.”

Hence it is easy to answer all



refresh and strengthen itself and not weaken in the struggle but grow continually stronger.

Here you have both truths, that it is Christ’s body and blood and that these are yours as your treasure and gift. Christ’s body can never be an unfruitful, vain

thing, impotent and useless. Yet, however great the treasure may be in itself, it must be comprehended in the Word and offered to us through the Word, otherwise we could never know of it or seek it.

Reflection Questions

1 Why is it necessary that you take part in the intimate act of eating the body and blood of Christ?

2 What is it about Holy Communion that “nourishes” you or “strengthens” you?

3 Luther says that the Lord’s Supper is “daily food.” How does frequent participation in the Lord’s Supper strengthen the body of Christ?

Connecting With Daily Life

Making a Visit

During this session, you and the other *Connections* participants are gathered around a table at the home of a participant to eat a simple meal together. Each of you will bring something; everyone serves the others at one time or another during the meal.

After the meal, talk about questions such as the following:

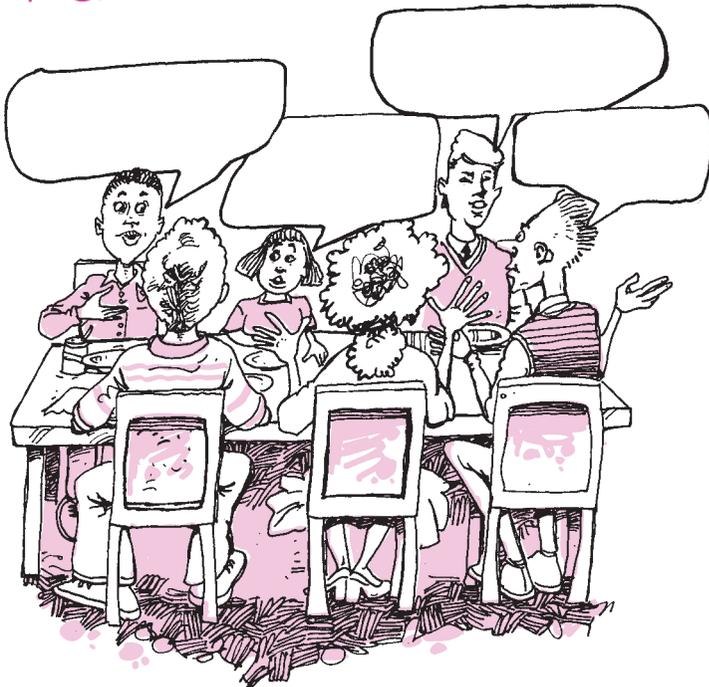
- What made your eating together a time of intimacy?
- What kind of connections — with people, ideas, memories — happened here that may not have happened in your usual group setting?

- Why do you think the following instructions were given:

Gather around a table.
Eat a simple meal.
Everyone bring something.
Everyone serves the others.

- How are you connected in a meal:

To others?
To the natural world?
To the world of hungry and suffering people?
To Christ?



Growing Together

Read together **Matthew 26:26-28** during the meal. Talk about how these words relate to your time together.

End the meal with singing or saying together the words of the hymn “We Place Upon Your Table, Lord” (ELW 467).

Pray together the Lord’s Prayer, pausing between petitions.

We Place Upon Your Table, Lord

We place upon your table, Lord,
where you by grace have bid us dine,
These tokens of our daily work,
the food of life, the bread and wine.

Within these simple things there lie
The height and depth of human life.
Our pain and tears, our thoughts and toils,
Our hopes and fears, our joy and strife.

Accept them, Lord; they come from you;
we take them humbly from your hand;
Put these your gifts to higher use:
the holy meal that you command.

Experiencing Until Next Time

As you eat your meals this week, think about what it means to break bread with those around you. In what ways can you eat alone and still share this communion with God and your community?

This week, make a point to share a meal with someone other than your usual mealtime companions: a coworker, a family member or a friend you haven’t seen for a while. Also, take a break from the chaos of your life and make one of your family meals a time of special joy. Spend longer than usual being with each other.

Connecting With Scriptures

Read and pray these passages together with friends or loved ones and see how forgiveness and grace connect to your life.

Read John 19.

1 How is the gift of Jesus' life for you "finished"? How is it just beginning?

2 There is no account of the Lord's Supper in John's gospel. In what ways is Jesus' crucifixion the heart of Holy Communion? How does Jesus give us to each other at the table of the Lord?

Woman,
here is
your
son. Here is
your
mother.

Read Romans 14.

1 How can you, when you gather at the Lord's Table, not judge others or put a stumbling block in front of them?

2 What things in your life have lost their significance because you belong to Christ and to others?

We do not live to ourselves,
and we do not die to ourselves.
If we live, we live to the Lord;
and if we die, we die to the Lord;
so then,
whether we live or whether we die,
we are the Lord's.

Read Psalms 121, 137 and 150, or others that are your favorites.

1 When have you "lifted up your eyes to the hills?" When did you lament, "How can we sing the Lord's song?" When did you simply praise God with your "whole being?"

2 How has God become even more familiar, more intimate, through your prayer and praying the psalms?

From
where
will my
help
come? My help
comes
from
the
Lord.

Using Other Resources

It (the Lord's Supper) places upon one a crisis of belief. If people could arrange for Christ's presence in Galilee or Chicago, Nazareth or Tokyo, all would gather — it is said. But the one who has heard the word of the Lord's Supper knows, "Christ is here!" Yet He comes again as the despised and rejected, the neglected, unknown and unloved.

From *The Hidden Discipline*, by **Martin Marty**, page 103.

Session Four

United in Time and Space

Being One Body The Sacrament of the Altar

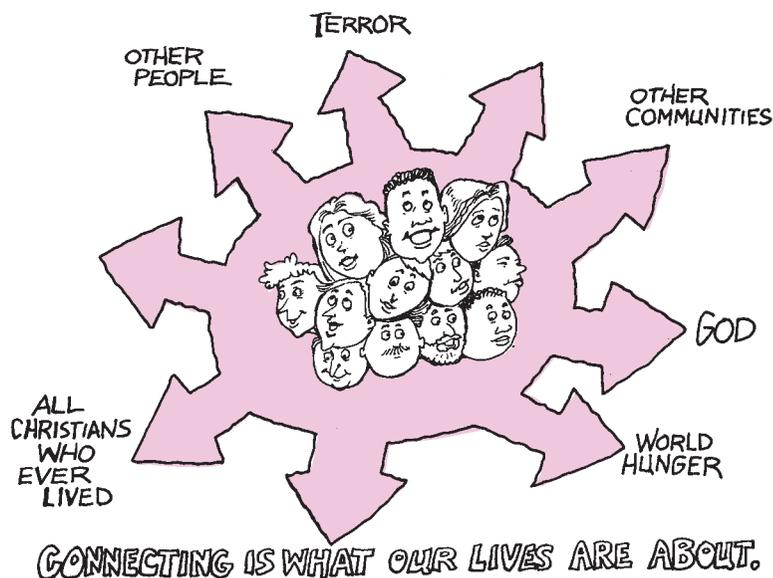
Going to the Heart of the Matter

In this session, we continue to explore the Sacrament of the Altar (Holy Communion).

Connecting is what our lives are about. We begin our lives connected to our parents. We continue throughout our lives connected to any number of people and communities. No matter what our gender, race, occupation or role, we are connected to one another in our common humanity.

We recognize our global connectedness not only politically and economically, but also in our direct awareness of world hunger and international terror. We are linked to one another, whether we like it or not, whether we want to be or not.

Holy Communion by its very name means being with God and with one another. When we gather around the Holy Supper, all Christians of every time and place are with us.



Beginning Where We Are

During the last session, you talked about what it means to commune with God and the people around you. You may also have shared a meal with someone with whom you ordinarily don't eat. Talk with another person about that experience.

- Who was at your table?
- What was intimate about your eating together?
- What kind of connections took place that may not have taken place in your usual setting?

In this session, you will reflect on the many kinds of "tables" in your life.

Imagine a round table. It can be any size you like. Now imagine your favorite people at the table.

- Whom do you see around your table?
- Why do you want them there?
- Who is missing from your table? Bring that person or persons to the table now.
- Is there anyone you would have a hard time welcoming? Why?
- When have you felt unwelcome at a table?

With another person, talk about the following:

- When have you felt unwelcome at the Lord's Table?
- As you imagined the table earlier, how did you connect Holy Communion and daily life?

In the language of negotiations and bargaining, "coming to the table" indicates a willingness to work toward reconciliation. The shape of the table, who issues the invitations and the placement of participants are important first steps in signaling who has power and who does not. By what means is reconciliation achieved in places of conflict?

Table

counter
board
plank
shelf
bar
stand

Sacrament of the Altar

The Eucharist
Holy Communion
The Lord's Supper
The Meal
The Lord's Table

Small Catechism

What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?

The words “given for you” and “shed for you for the forgiveness of sins” show us that forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament through these words, because where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation.

How can bodily eating and drinking do such a great thing?

Eating and drinking certainly do not do it, but rather the words that are recorded: “given for you” and “shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” These words, when accompanied by the physical eating and drinking, are the essential thing in the sacrament, and whoever believes these very words has what they declare and state, namely, “forgiveness of sins.”

Who, then, receives this sacrament worthily?

Fasting and bodily preparation are in fact a fine external discipline, but a person who has faith in these words, “given for you” and “shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,” is really worthy and well prepared. However, a person who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, because the words “for you” require truly believing hearts.

Large Catechism (Excerpt Summary)

The whole Gospel and the article of the Creed, “I believe in the holy Christian church, the forgiveness of sins,” are embodied in this sacrament and offered to us through the Word. Those who receive its power and benefit are the ones who believe what the words say and what they give, for they are not spoken to stone and wood but to those who hear them. The treasure is opened and placed at everyone’s table, yes, upon everyone’s table, but it is also your responsibility to take it and confidently believe that it is just as the words tell you.

This treasure can be grasped and appropriated only by the heart; it cannot be seized with the hand. Those who claim to be

Christians should prepare themselves to receive this blessed sacrament frequently. Some become listless and lazy and let a year, or two, three, or more go by without receiving it. Some were taught they should not go unless they feel hunger and thirst. No one should be coerced, but Christ did not institute this sacrament to be treated merely as a spectacle. Christians who cherish and honor the sacrament will of their own accord urge and impel themselves to come. We are not granted liberty to despise the sacrament.

This is for the benefit of the cold and indifferent, that they may come to their senses and wake up. If a person stays away from the sacrament day by day they will become more and more

callous and eventually spurn it altogether.

But suppose you say, “What if I feel that I am unfit?” Then nature and reason begin to contrast our unworthiness with this great and precious blessing and it appears like a dark lantern in contrast to the bright sun, or as dung in contrast to jewels. If you choose to fix your eye on how good and pure you are, to work toward the time when nothing will prick your conscience, you will never go.

We must never regard the sacrament as a harmful thing from which we should flee, but as a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine. If you wait until you are rid of your burden in order to come you must stay away from this sacrament forever. Suppose you say, “What shall I do if I cannot feel this need or experience hunger and thirst for the sacrament?” For those persons I know

no better advice than to suggest that they put their hands to their bosom and ask whether they are made of flesh and blood. If you cannot feel the need, therefore, at least believe the Scriptures.

Again, look about you and see whether you are also in the world. If you do not know, ask your neighbors about it. If you are in the world, do not think that there will be any lack of sins and needs. Just begin to act as if you want to become good and cling to the Gospel and see whether you will not acquire enemies who harm, wrong, and injure you and give you occasion for sin and wrong-doing.

Besides the flesh and world, you will surely have the devil about you. You will not entirely trample the devil under foot because our Lord Christ could not entirely avoid Satan. Just examine yourself, look around a little and cling to the Scriptures.

Reflection Questions

1 This sacrament is “for you” and placed on “everyone’s table.” How is the Eucharist both a personal and a communal event?

2 Why do you think Luther spends so much time on the many ways we might keep ourselves from the sacrament?

3 What enemies have you acquired because you “clung to the Gospel”?

Activity One: Uniting With Every Time and Place

How does Holy Communion connect you to people of every time and place?

One way is through a prayer called the “Eucharistic Prayer.” The Eucharistic Prayer (also known as the Prayer of Thanksgiving) details the history of salvation.

With other participants, go through this prayer (ELW page 110 or page 111) — or a similar one — in your congregation hymnal, and look for words, phrases or sentences that refer to the past, the present and the future, and to places of all kinds.

The Eucharistic Prayer
Words about Times Words about Places

Talk about the following:

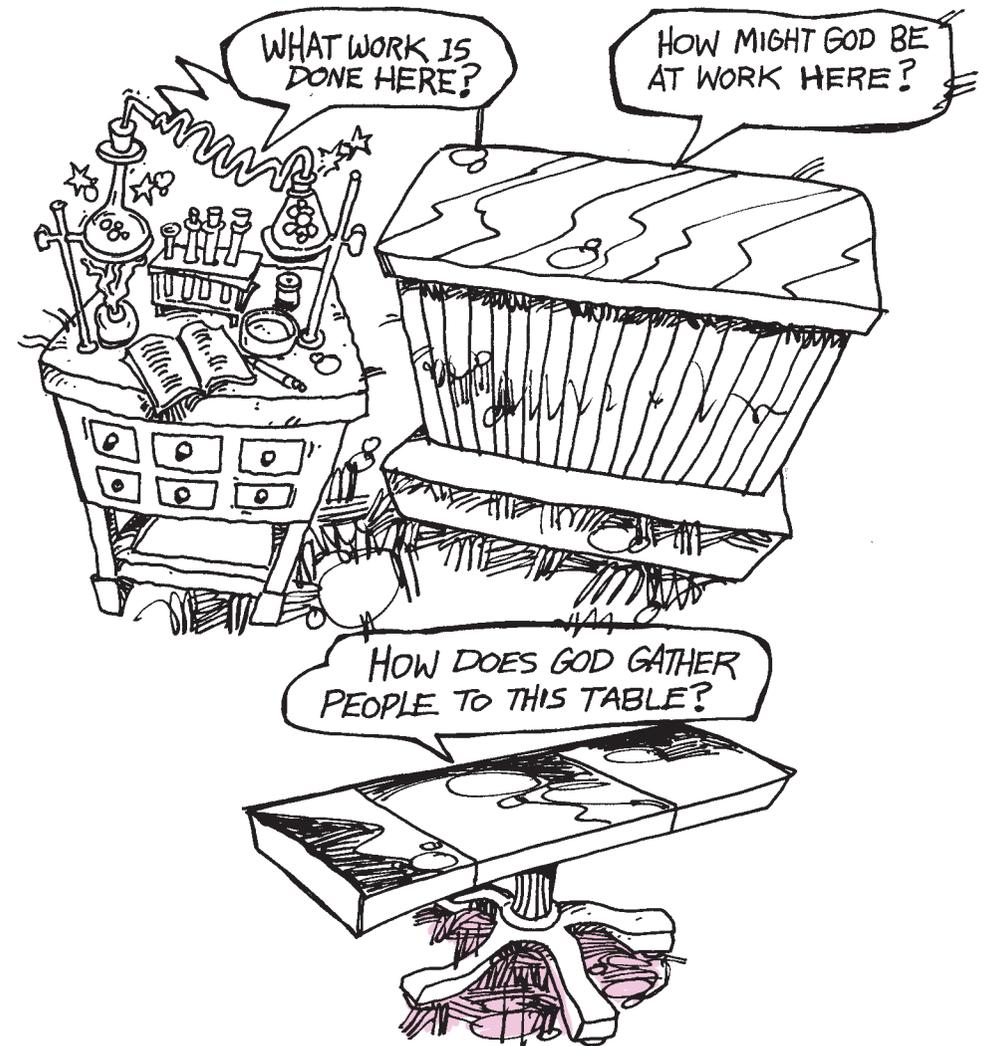
- In what ways is the world different today because of the death and resurrection of Jesus?
- How is God present in today’s history as God has been present in past history?
- In what ways do you represent the presence of Christ in this place and in this time in history?

Activity Two: Looking at Tables

Tables take all forms in our daily life: roundtable discussions, work tables, restaurant tables, operating tables. The Creator God sets these tables before us.

With another person, talk about the following:

- What tables are in your workplace?
- Who is present at these tables? Who is absent?
- How does God carry that creative work beyond that workplace?
- What new possibilities for life do you see at these tables?
- What global connections do you see at these tables?



Experiencing Until Next Time

Sit Around

During the week, consider the tables where you sit, work, eat or relax. Ask yourself (and others who sit there, if you choose):

- **What do you do here? How are you connected?**
- **Who comes to this table? Who is missing?**
- **How does participating in Holy Communion at the Table of the Lord make a difference in what you do at this table?**



Growing Together

Read Acts 2:44-47. Reflect quietly on these questions:
What appeals to me about this scenario? What concerns me?

Pray together:

O Christ, the Connector, you have joined us as one in your very body and blood. Help us perceive and believe that we are your people in this place. As grains of wheat and grapes remain individual, yet come together in bread and wine, so bring us together as sisters and brothers, and join us as one.
Amen

Connecting With the Congregation

- **How does participating in Holy Communion connect you with people at various congregational gatherings?**
- **How does it connect you with the ministries in daily life of other congregational members?**
- **How do you feel about the frequency of the Eucharist in your congregation's worship life?**
- **How do you, or could you, make Holy Communion possible for those who cannot physically come to the table?**
- **For what and for whom might you pray as you observe fellow believers at Holy Communion?**

Connecting With Scriptures

As you read and pray these passages during the coming days, consider how you are joined to Christ and all Christians.

Read John 20:1-18.

1 Mary came to serve, feared to look, turned to see and ran to tell. Who is the risen Christ to you?

Jesus said to her,
"Mary!"

2 How does Jesus' resurrection encounter begin to draw you together with others as the Body of Christ (the Church)?

She turned and
said to him,
"Teacher."

Read Romans 12.

1 Think about the gifts present in the members of your congregation. Whom do you picture? What are they doing?

We, who are many,
are one body in Christ,
and individually
we are members
one of another.

Read Psalm 96.

1 Contemplate all the “families of people” and nations through the ages who are joined with you in worship.

2 How is the Eucharist a feast of the Lord who is still coming?
O sing to the Lord a new song,
sing to the Lord,
all the earth.

Using Other Resources

(The concept of the *round table*) looks for ways that God reaches out to include all those whom society and religion have declared outsiders, and invites them to gather round God’s table of hospitality.

From *Church in the Round*,
by Letty Russell, page 27.

Session Five

Free to Confess

Release From Bondage The Office of the Keys and Confession

Going to the Heart of the Matter

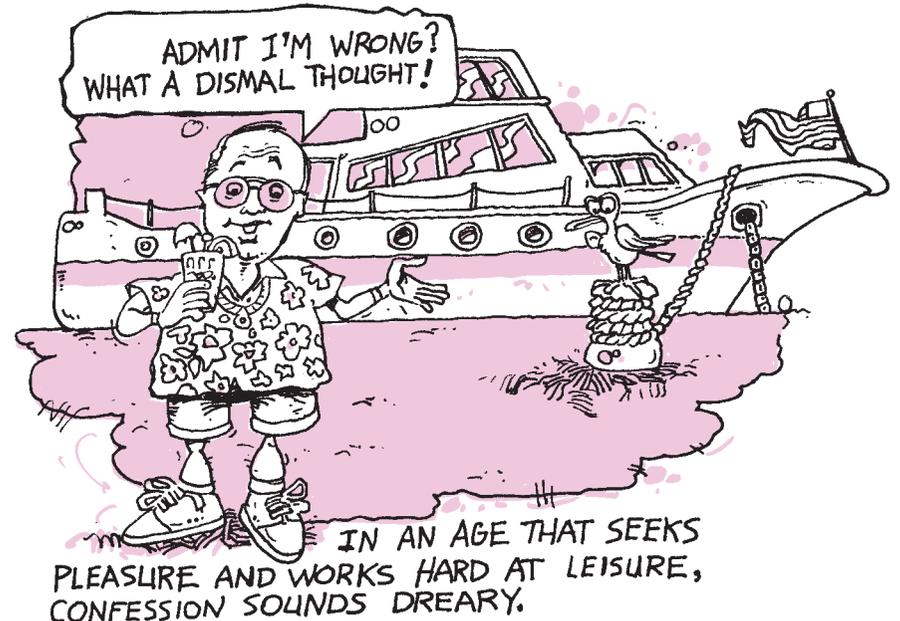
In this session, we explore the Office of the Keys and confession.

The recognition that we need to set things right — the need to confess our sins — may be the most painful part of our faith journey. We need to remind ourselves that God’s love and mercy never end. No

scripture lets us know this more surely than the story of the prodigal child who returns home to the welcoming parent (Luke 15:11-32). God is such a parent, waiting to enfold us with warmth and forgiveness.

In an age that seeks pleasure and works hard at leisure, confession sounds dreary. Yet we hunger for a profound release from inner burdens and haunting guilt, and seek the key to a deeper freedom. In Baptism, all are forever forgiven. Every day we can face our sinfulness, admit that reality and seek forgiveness. Every day, through our Spirit-graced capability to forgive others, we are able to release others from their bondages with this same key: forgiveness.

Confession is a gift, one day at a time.



Beginning Where We Are

In the last session, you explored the many “tables” in your life. You were invited to reflect on a particular table with particular guests. Think about that table again.

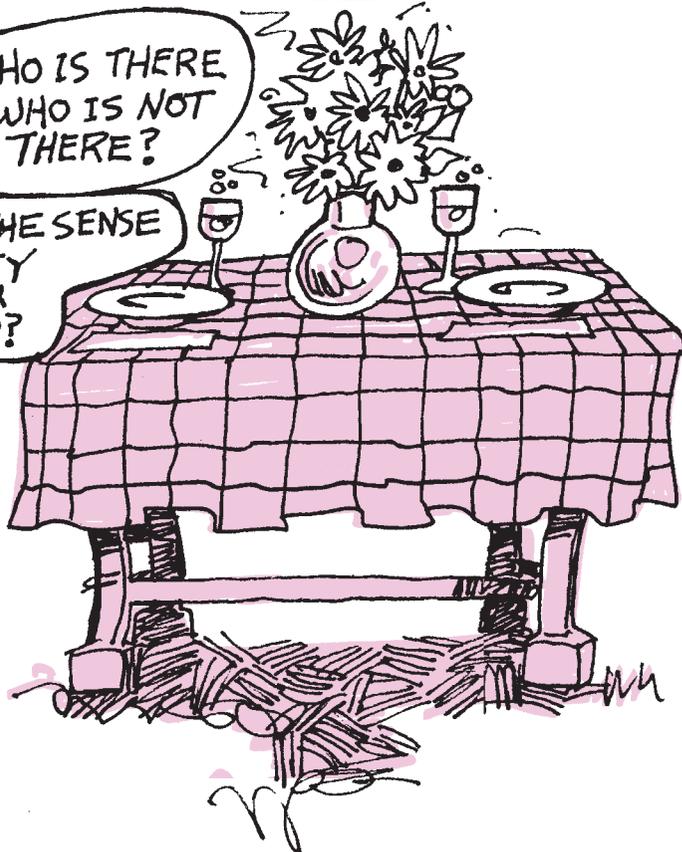
WHAT SKILL DO YOU USE
TO FOSTER COMMUNICATION
AND INCLUSIVENESS?

WHAT NEEDS
CONFESSION AND
FORGIVENESS?

WHAT DIVISION OR BROKENNESS
IS PRESENT AT THE TABLE?

WHO IS THERE
AND WHO IS NOT
THERE?

HOW IS THE SENSE
OF COMMUNITY
CREATED OR
BLOCKED?



Connecting With the Faith

The Office of the Keys

Small Catechism

What is the “Office of the Keys”?

It is that authority which Christ gave to the church to forgive the sins of those who repent and to declare to those who do not repent that their sins are not forgiven.

What are the words of Christ?

Our Lord Jesus Christ said to his disciples: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” — John 20:23.

“Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” — Matthew 1:18.

Confession

Small Catechism

What is confession?

Confession consists of two parts. One is that we confess our sins. The other is that we receive the absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the confessor as from God and by no means doubt but firmly believe that our sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven.

Which sins is a person to confess?

Before God one is to acknowledge the guilt for all sins, even those of which we are not aware, as we do in the Lord’s Prayer. However, before the confessor we are to confess only those sins of which we have knowledge and which trouble us.

Which sins are these?

Here reflect on your walk of life in light of the Ten Commandments: whether you are father, mother, son, daughter, master, mistress, servant; whether you have been disobedient, unfaithful, lazy, whether you have harmed anyone by word or deed; whether you have stolen, neglected, wasted, or injured anything.

Large Catechism (Excerpt Summary)

Concerning confession, we have always taught that it should be voluntary. We may confess without coercion or fear, and we are released from the torture of enumerating all sins in detail. We have the advantage of knowing how to use confession beneficially for the comforting and strengthening of our conscience.

Unfortunately people have learned this only too well; they do whatever they please and take advantage of their freedom, acting as if they will never need or desire to go to confession any more. We quickly understand whatever benefits us and we grasp with uncommon ease whatever in the Gospel is mild and gentle. But such pigs, as I have said, are unworthy to appear in the presence of the Gospel or to have any part of it. The one who will not believe the Gospel, live according to it, and do what a Christian ought to do should enjoy none of its benefits.

In addition to the common confession there are two other kinds, confessing to God alone or to our neighbor alone, begging for forgiveness. The whole Lord's Prayer is nothing else than such a confession. This kind of confession must take place incessantly as long as we live. For this is the essence of a genuinely Christian life, to acknowledge that we are sinners and to pray for grace.

We are also to confess our guilt before one another and forgive one another before we come into God's presence to beg for for-

giveness. Now, all of us are debtors one to another, therefore we should and we may confess publicly in everyone's presence, no one being afraid of anyone else. Besides our universal guilt there is also a particular one, when a person has provoked another to anger and needs to beg the person's pardon.

When some problem or quarrel sets us at one another's throats and we cannot settle it, and yet we do not find ourselves sufficiently strong in faith, we may at any time and as often as we wish lay our complaint before a brother or sister, seeking advice, comfort, and strength. Thus by divine ordinance Christ has entrusted absolution to the Christian church and commanded us to absolve one another from sins (Matt 18:15-19).

Confession consists of two parts. The first is my work and act, when I lament my sin and desire comfort and restoration for my soul. The second is a work which God does, when God absolves me of my sins through a word placed in the mouth of a human being. This is the surpassingly grand and noble thing that makes confession so wonderful and comforting. We should set little value on our work but exalt and magnify God's Word.

If anybody does not go to confession willingly and for the sake of absolution, let that one just forget about it. And if people go about relying on the purity of their own confession, let them just stay away from it. We urge you, however, to confess and

express your needs, not for the purpose of performing a work but to hear what God wishes to say to you. Concentrate on absolution, cherishing it as a great and wonderful treasure.

If you are a Christian, you should be glad to run more than a hundred miles for confession, not under compulsion but rather coming and compelling us to offer it. For here the compulsion must be inverted; we must come under the command and you must come into freedom. We compel no one, but allow ourselves to be compelled, just as we

are compelled to preach and administer the sacrament.

Therefore when I urge you to go to confession, I am simply urging you to be a Christian. Those who really want to be good Christians, free from their sins, and happy in their conscience, already have the true hunger and thirst, as Ps. 42:1 says, "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God." Let us lift our hands in praise and thanks to God that we have attained to this blessed knowledge of confession.

Reflection Questions

1 In what ways have you ever made use of private confession? How was it beneficial to you? Would you like to use it more often? Why or why not?

2 Luther was trying to turn a burden into a gift. How could confession be something not *imposed* on you, but *allowed*?

3 If laypersons ask their pastor to administer Holy Communion more frequently and to make private confession available, how might it change the dynamics in your congregation?

4 What do you see in Luther's explanation of confession that might continue to hold this group together?

Activity One: Making a Workplace Visit

This visit will give you an opportunity to explore a participant's workplace world. In this visit, you will look especially at the connection between a workplace and confession.

Making the Visit

1 As you tour the place where your host has invited you, ask:

- What role does the host play in this world?
- With whom does the host relate?
- What are some of the problems in this world?
- What are some of the satisfactions?

2 Listen carefully as your host describes the world and what happens there. Reflect on these questions:

- What problems are sometimes denied in this place?
- How are confession and forgiveness shown in this place?

3 Make the faith connections.



Activity Two: Reflecting on Your Workplace

In your workplace, you are often put in situations that tempt you to show less-than-Christlike values:

- Overcharging a customer
- Calling in sick when you just want a day off
- Covering up an error to protect a coworker

You may rationalize these choices:

- "This business needs to maximize its profit."
- "I worked hard for this day off."
- "My coworker may lose her job if I am honest about what she did."

Think about your own workplace (whatever your work, including volunteer activities or household upkeep). Think about your capacity and responsibility to forgive those who are "truly repentant." Consider how this "office" provides you and others with a key to righting wrongs, to restoring relationships with each other and with God. With another person, talk about these questions:

- What do you do in your workplace that you wish you wouldn't do?
- Why do you do it?
- What do you avoid doing?
- What keeps you from doing it?
- In what ways are you being true or untrue to your ministry when you make these decisions?

Think back to a significant time when you were forgiven. (This could be at work, at home, in your community.) After you complete the chart here, talk about your answers.

A Time of Forgiveness

significance

Feelings of Freedom

The Difference It Made

Changes in Relationship

Experiencing Until Next Time

Private Confession

In weekly worship you have the opportunity for public confession. This week arrange for a time of private confession with someone you trust. This might be a more formal session with a pastor, counselor or human relations staff person at your place of work. Your private confession might also be less formal — a time of heart-to-heart conversation with a sibling, your spouse or best friend. If distance is a factor, consider a telephone call or e-mail. You may even consider confessing a long-standing or continuing sin or sinful attitude directly to the person that your sin most affects.

As an alternative or additional activity, be specially aware of opportunities to serve as the one to whom others confess their sins. How can you help others who want to repent of their grudges or who want to get rid of long-standing guilt? How are confessing and hearing confessions related to each other?

Whatever option you choose, prepare yourself for the experience with a time of prayer, perhaps with a rereading of Luther's thoughts in this session's material. Keep track of the range of your emotions as you decide to engage in this experience.

Explore some lingering problems or conflict within your congregation that need resolution. Think how the power of confession and absolution might be applied here.

Connecting With the Congregation

Growing Together

Read Psalm 51:1-10. Reflect quietly on this question: When have you especially experienced God's steadfast love and abundant mercy in spite of your transgressions?

Pray together:

O Christ, your love for us goes on and on. Fill us with confidence by your Spirit, that we might be agents of your forgiveness and resurrection among all who need us. In your name we pray. Amen



IF YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN, YOU SHOULD BE GLAD TO RUN MORE THAN A HUNDRED MILES FOR CONFESSION.

Connecting With Scriptures

Because the Scriptures reveal God's own nature to us — and because God's own nature is filled with loving forgiveness — you can read and pray the following sections of the Bible knowing that you are connecting to God's will for your life.

Read John 20:19-30.

1 Jesus says three times, "Peace be with you." How, in the middle of your doubt, does Jesus continue to offer you peace?

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.

2 Where in the world does Jesus send you to carry out the ministry of the forgiveness of sins?

Read Romans 15.

1 Paul remains confident about the brothers and sisters who have enjoyed each others' company "for a little while." Even when the church is pretty ragged, what is your hope for this company of people living together in forgiveness?

2 Why are confession and absolution ongoing necessities if you are to "build up the neighbor" and "welcome one another" in Christ?

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.

Read Psalm 51.

1 In this familiar, wrenching psalm of David before Nathan, feel your own desire for forgiveness, deliverance and restoration. What friend do you have before whom you can confess to God?

2 How do confession and absolution create a clean heart and put a new spirit in you?

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

Using Other Resources

Under the quiet roofs, along the broad, tree-lined avenues of our villages, in the glass and steel of our apartments, on our farms, live people who use gentility to cover up terror. ... They use politeness to cover up loneliness; apathy to cover up despair; escape to cover up the vacuum that will not let us be alone with ourselves. In the face of this condition, people of other professions who deal with persons ask the evangelical churches why they have given up their greatest disciplinary and therapeutic treasure, confession of sins and absolution.

From *The Hidden Discipline*, by Martin Marty, page 95.

Session Six

Ages and Stages

Faith for a Lifetime
Morning and Evening Prayers;
Grace at Table

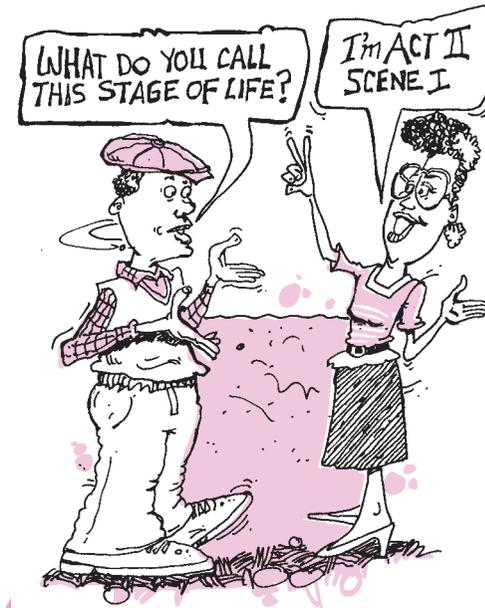
Going to the Heart of the Matter

In this session we explore the journey of faith through the life cycle. We look at the Morning and Evening Prayers and Grace at Table of the *Small Catechism*, which was written for families. Incorporating such prayers into daily spiritual disciplines can sustain us for a lifetime.

We have looked around our worlds and have seen the many places where God is at work. In this session, we learn to continue making these observations as we move through life's stages.

Adulthood is not a place of arrival; it has many stages. Or it's like a play with different acts and scenes. Each includes mountaintop experiences of clarity and joy, as well as deep valleys of pain, struggle and doubt. Physically, emotionally, intellectually and relationally we are always changing. Yet inside do we basically remain the same?

Our images of God and even the ways we relate to God may change. As children, Jesus may be someone who holds our hand when we cross the street. As young adults choosing a vocation, Jesus may be the prophet challenging us to serve the oppressed. As an older adult recently widowed, Jesus may be a companion. Throughout the journey, God remains faithful and constant. God and God's love never change.



Beginning Where We Are

At the end of last session you were challenged to make private confession with someone. Whether or not you were able to have this experience, think about these questions.

- Which was (is) easier for you, confessing or forgiving? Why?
- In your experience, what are the advantages and disadvantages of public and private confession?
- When have you been surprised by the confession of another person who sought your forgiveness?

In this session you will consider the way in which God is with you, and the ways you remain close to God during various stages in your life. With one other person, talk about these questions:

- What image describes the stage of the life cycle where you are now?
- What are some changes — emotional, spiritual, occupational or relational — that you have just gone through or anticipate going through?
- How has your image of God or God's activity changed throughout your life cycle? How has God's love remained constant?

Small Catechism

Morning and Evening Prayers

In the morning, as soon as you get out of bed, you are to make the sign of the holy cross and say:

“God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit watch over me. Amen.”

Then, kneeling or standing, say the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. If you wish, you may in addition recite this little prayer as well:

“I give thanks to you, my heavenly Father through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have protected me this night from all harm and danger, and I ask you that you would also protect me today from sin and all evil, so that my life and actions may please you completely. For into your hands I commend myself: my body, my soul, and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.”

After singing a hymn perhaps (for example, one on the Ten Commandments) or whatever else may serve your devotion, you are to go to your work joyfully.

In the evening, when you go to bed, you are to make the sign of the holy cross and say:

“God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit watch over me. Amen.”

Then, kneeling or standing, say the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. If you wish, you may in addition recite this little prayer as well:

“I give thanks to you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have graciously protected me today, and I ask you to forgive me all my sins, where I have done wrong, and graciously to protect me tonight. For into your hands I commend myself: my body, my soul, and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.”

Then you are to go to sleep quickly and cheerfully.



Grace at Table

Blessing Before Eating

The children and the members of the household are to come devoutly to the table, fold their hands, and recite:

“The eyes of all wait upon you, O LORD, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy all living things with delight.”

Comment: “Delight” means that all animals receive enough to eat to make them joyful and of good cheer, because worry and greed prevent such delight.

Then they are to recite the Lord’s Prayer and the following prayer:

“LORD God, heavenly Father, bless us and these your gifts, which we receive from your bountiful goodness through Jesus Christ our LORD. Amen.”

Thanksgiving After Eating

Similarly, after eating they should in the same manner fold their hands and recite devoutly:

“The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living creature.”

Then recite the Lord’s Prayer and the following prayer:

“Lord God, bless us and these your gifts, which we receive from your bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Reflection Questions

1 What daily devotional rituals are part of your life now? What daily rituals might you adopt that could help you grow in your faith?

2 Many people catch meals on the run. With whom might you gather regularly to pray?

3 How do your personal prayers also open you to praying for the well-being of others?

Activity One: Ages and Stages

Read the following descriptions of life stages. With several other persons, talk about the stages and the reflection questions that follow each. If you have yet to experience certain stages, think about someone you know who is in that stage.



Young Adults

Young adulthood is a time of entering the adult world and making transitions. Key issues center on commitments, intimacy and consistency between faith and life. This is a time of moving from questioning faith toward owning your own faith. At this time of life you can look seriously at how your vocational choices carry out your ministry in daily life.

- At this age what are (were) your key questions about your future?
- Who is (was) God for you?

Middle Adults

Middle adults have lived long enough to have considerable self-identity, but transitions into and during middle adulthood may be confusing. At this stage you think you understand who you are, what your connections and commitments are, what's expected of you and, more difficultly, what you expect of yourself. You may begin to re-examine personal and family goals. You may feel stagnation, or may once again look around at the world and turn outward in renewed creativity.

- In the middle years, what are (were) new challenges you face (faced)?
- What are (were) the faith questions? Who is (was) God?



Older Adults

There are many stages of older adulthood. You may enter these times with renewed questions of vocation, such as "What shall I do with the life I have left?" Retirement is not the only definition of this stage of life. Health and economics are central concerns. How you see yourself and God determines whether this will be a faith journey toward despair or one of integrity. You have varied places and worlds for ministry in daily life. You have new opportunities for learning. Baptism as blessing provides meaning and mission for the final third of life.



- How is the God of the covenant with you on the journey? What is (will be) your relationship to this God?
- What new ministry opportunities are (might be) emerging?

Activity Two: Remembering Connections

Think about the visits you've made and the people you've met during your *Connections* experience. With the group, talk about your experiences and how they have changed your ways of thinking and acting as a Christian.



Activity Three: An Ideally Connected Day

With two or three others, explore what an “ideally connected day” would be like in your worlds. This would be a day in which faith and life were well joined, a day filled with the satisfaction of living out God’s will, no matter how easy or hard the day’s activities. It would be a day when your prayers for faithfulness to God’s calling would be answered, your hopes for spiritual maturity seen in your actions.

You can talk about — or draw — your ideally connected day using the following items as a guide:

- **Name one of your worlds (work, home, community or volunteer).**
- **Share examples of the ways your ministry is needed there.**
- **Identify enjoyable aspects of that ministry.**
- **Name one obstacle or risk in that ministry setting. Explore one way to deal with this difficulty and the resources you might need to do so.**
- **Recall a faith perspective that relates to the situation.**
- **Develop two ways to grow in this ministry: first, one step to take; second, a discipline you intend to continue.**



Tell each person in the *Connections* group one gift you have noticed in that person; share one hope or challenge you have for the person’s continuing growth in faith, mission and ministry.

Pray Together:

O Christ, your love for us goes on and on. Fill us with confidence by your Spirit, that we might be agents of your forgiveness and resurrection. Help us to grow in faith each day of our lives until we reach that time when we shall be with you forever in heaven. Bless each one of us here and keep us united in your love. Amen

Connecting With the Congregation

Discuss ways to share with the congregation what *Connections* has meant to you. Think how what you have learned could be valuable in other elements of life together in your congregation. Explore the possibility of forming other *Connections* groups.

Experiencing Until Next Time

Walk About

It might be awhile until you’re in another *Connections* group. In the meantime, your daily walk can be enriched by this experience. To carry it with you, consider carrying a small touchstone or wearing a piece of jewelry that reminds you of your calling as a Christian. Find a time each day — the start and end of a day may work best — during which you can pray or meditate.

As you walk through your life stages as one of Jesus’ disciples, remember that Christ is with you in all you do. He has lived as a human and experienced life in all its fullness. That means that your Savior is closely mindful of your struggles and joys. You are loved. You are blessed. You are gifted!

Connecting With Scriptures

Read or pray these sections of the Bible as a reminder of the joy of exploring Scripture.

Read John 21.

1 How is Jesus calling you, asking if you love him, telling you to follow him and feed his sheep?

2 What are the stories of Jesus' love that are being written in the chapters of your book of life?

But there are also many other things that **Jesus** did.

Read Romans 16.

1 Read the greetings in this chapter and write your own greetings, putting in names of brothers and sisters in Christ you have come to cherish (even if some greetings are farewells).

2 Pray the benediction of verses 25-27, and add your own final words from your faith journey with Paul through Romans and through your own worlds.

Greet one another with a holy **KISS.**

Read Psalm 90.

1 What are the many experiences of God in this psalm, from wrath to compassion? What experiences in your life are similar?

2 Meditate on the span of your life and how it is part of God's "from everlasting to everlasting."

Lord,
you have been
our dwelling place
in all generations...

Using Other Resources

Often things happen to us that have a meaning we don't understand at the time. Yet we know that something of unusual importance has occurred. We may be sitting with a friend or reading or listening to music or walking alone in nature when something alerts us. Like Moses at the burning bush, we proceed carefully, aware that we are on holy ground. God's time and our time intersect, and we have the gift to know it.

What I believe is that God is present to us and we are in God's presence in every action of our lives. Becoming aware of this is spiritual growth, and living as attentively as possible in that reality is what life is all about.

From *The Breath of Life: A Simple Way to Pray*, by Ron DelBene, pages 13 and 15.

Connections: Faith and Life

Unit Four Living Freely

The Sacraments

Participant Resource

Authors

Norma Cook Everist

Nelvin Vos

Editorial Team

Bob Sitze

Christine E. Weiser

Carol Weiser

Advisory Team

Norma Cook Everist

Sally Simmel

Bob Sitze

Nelvin Vos

Carol Weiser

Design

Kathryn Brewer

Illustration

Joe van Severen

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Session One

A New Beginning for Life

Living Into Our Baptism The Sacrament of Holy Baptism

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Recognize the significance of their name and of being named.
- Understand that being baptized into Christ means becoming part of the global and universal church of all ages.
- Claim the name of Christ and wear it daily.
- Appreciate Baptism in a renewed way.
- Be strengthened for bearing Christ's name in the places of daily life.
- Be able to share the meaning of Baptism with someone not part of a Christian community

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group.

Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.

Ask participants to turn to the “Getting Acquainted” section in their participant resources and to talk about their responses to the questions there with someone they know less well.

Allow about 10 minutes for this conversation. Then have participants introduce each other to the group by sharing their partner's full name and one response their partner gave to one of the other questions.

If you have done other units of *Connections* and new people have joined the group, incorporating new members may be difficult since you have shared some significant experiences with one another. Acknowledge this challenge with the group and invite their help in the renewed formation of the group.

While this get-acquainted activity may seem redundant, especially if there are no new people in the group, remember that each day you and other participants begin again; your issues and your stations are always changing. In some ways, your names are also changing as you change and as people see different aspects of your identity.

Some people may be reluctant to share their names or the stories of their names. For example, they may not like their name or they may be reluctant to share how they received a certain nickname. Tell participants that they need share with one another only what they care to share. When they introduce their partner, they should tell only what seems appropriate from the more intimate conversa-

tion. The objective is for the group to become (again) a trusting, learning community.



Ask participants to turn to the section “Beginning Where We Are” in the participant resource and to complete some of the sections on the chart. Give participants a minute or two for this, then ask them to find another person and to talk about their responses.

“Getting my start” is an idea that most participants can readily identify as familiar. If some participants find it difficult to recall some of these significant life moments, change the question slightly to “When did you first know that you wanted to marry your spouse, engage in a certain kind of work, understand that your life made a difference, want to stop living for only yourself, and so forth?” Another way to start these kind of thoughts is this question: “Who got you started in some aspect of your life?”

Provide a few moments for sharing and discussion. Briefly summarize the focus of the unit (the sacraments of Baptism, Holy Communion and Confession) and note that the focus of this session, Baptism, could be thought of as a kind of beginning, no matter at what age a person is baptized.



Connecting With the Faith

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating. *The Small Catechism* section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.



Connecting With Daily Life

You have several choices for activities in this time segment. Each can be shortened considerably by limiting discussion, but both activities help participants experience the meanings of Baptism in a variety of learning styles.

Activity One: From Small Beginnings

Choose from among the three options here, depending on the time and location at which your group meets. All three activities offer the group a shared experience about Baptism, and help elicit both stories and personal understandings about Baptism.

At the Baptismal Font

Make arrangements for this visit to your sanctuary and to prepare the font or baptistry. You may also want to have ready some of the typical baptismal items.

Participating in Baptism

Explore when a Baptism is scheduled. Make plans to attend together as a *Connections* group.

The Items of Baptism

Schedule the use of the items before your group meeting. If you meet in a home, you may also want to replicate a baptismal font at your meeting by filling a large bowl with water, and placing it and a cloth napkin in a prominent location.

Encourage participants to tell what they know of their baptisms, even if it is simply stories they were told or pictures they have seen. For participants who have not been baptized, encourage them to tell of their faith journey. Allow plenty of time for each person to tell his or her story.

In any of the optional activities, you can intersperse participants' personal stories with readings from the following passages from the service of Holy Baptism. Also use hymns appropriate to Baptism, both favorite as well as lesser-known hymns.

As participants engage in any of these options, the discussion can range through the questions and items included in the participant resource, but should focus on the connections between the theology of Baptism and the daily lives of participants.

Holy Baptism, from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*

"In baptism our gracious heavenly Father frees us from sin and death by joining us to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are born children of a fallen humanity; by water and the Holy Spirit we are reborn children of God and made members of the church, the body of Christ. Living with Christ and in the communion of saints, we grow in faith, love, and obedience to the will of God."

"We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning your Spirit moved over the waters and by your Word you created the world, calling forth life in which you took delight. Through the waters of the flood you delivered Noah and his family, and through the sea you led your people Israel from slavery into freedom. At the river your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Holy Spirit. By the baptism of Jesus' death and resurrection you set us free from the power of sin and death and raise us up to live in you."

"Pour out your Holy Spirit, the power of your living Word, that those who are washed in the waters of baptism may be given new life. To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen."

"We welcome you into the body of Christ and into the mission we share: join us in giving thanks and praise to God and bearing God's creative and redeeming word to all the world."
—*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.
(Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006)
pp. 227, 230, 231.

Activity Two: Reminding Us of Our Baptism

Encourage the participants to think of places that might remind them that they are baptized members of God's family. The participant resources provides a few questions for personal sharing.



Experiencing Until Next Time

Read the material in this section of the participant resource. If some have not been part of a *Connections* group before, explain that this section includes suggestions for their reflection during the coming week.



Growing Together

Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session. The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Connecting With Scriptures

Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John's Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use "Connecting with Scriptures."

Session Two

Freedom From Is Freedom For

Living Free The Sacrament of Holy Baptism

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Understand more fully the power of Baptism in daily life.
- Perceive Baptism as offering daily liberation from bondage.
- Recognize past feelings of freedom from sin and guilt.
- Feel the depths of the power of sin and appreciate the power of forgiveness.
- Let go of sin that still enslaves them.
- Speak freedom in Christ to at least one person during the week in the ordinary language of daily life.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.

Beginning Where We Are

When all have arrived, ask participants to briefly talk about their observations about water as suggested in the last session. Spend about five minutes on this matter.

- How have people used water throughout the ages?
- How do you use water today?
- How does water enhance life, and how does it diminish life?
- What feelings — about life, about God, about yourself — does water bring to mind?
- In what ways is water a sign of God?

Make sure to make time for a conversation about freedom. Say, “Think of a time when you felt free,” then ask, “What was it like?” Suggest that participants imagine the experience. Invite them to close their eyes, relax and picture as completely as possible a time when they felt free. Have them recall both what was happening and their feelings at the time.

Then continue with conversation using the rest of the questions in this section in the participant resource.

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating. *The Small Catechism* section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.

Connecting With the Faith



Activity One: Freedom From Is Freedom For

To set the stage for the miming activity, ask participants to think about the meaning of sin for them. Refer them to the chart in their participant resource, and ask, "What is sin like for you? How would you describe your experience of sin?"

Give participants a few minutes to complete that portion of the chart in their participant resource, then ask, "What is grace like for you? How would you describe your experience of grace?"

Again, give participants a few minutes to complete this part of the checklist in their participant resource.

This is not a multiple choice question. Sin and grace are abstract concepts. Each participant has had very concrete experiences of sin and grace. Additionally, sin and grace are experienced differently among people, particularly at different stages of the life cycle. This conversation gives participants an opportunity to describe sin and grace in the language of their daily lives.

After participants have completed the checklist, ask them to share their choices with a partner, explaining the reasons why they have checked various concepts for sin and grace. After some time for sharing, bring the entire group together and briefly characterize freedom as God's grace overcoming sin. In Christ we are freed from sin and freed for ministry in daily life.

Activity Two: Miming Bondages; Un-miming in Freedom

After participants have shared their various realizations of sin and grace, move on to the miming activity itself.

Before participants can talk more about freedom, they should identify their bondages. In the miming activity that follows, participants will show that identifying bondages is more than confessing sins. Instead, it is a discussion of the issues, drives and confinements that lie behind those individual sins. The object here is not to show immorality but to reveal the deep, underlying powers that claim our souls, the conditions that make us depressed, fearful or angry. Luther called these forces "sin, death and the devil."

The directions for the activity are given in the participant resource.

This activity may seem risky, but with an atmosphere of trust and with time, people will participate. You or your co-leader should be ready to demonstrate a bondage so people know what they are invited to do. Keep the miming simple; others may be as creative as they wish. After your example of a bondage, allow time and simply wait. Remain silent and respectful of the depth of sharing people are willing to do.

After all who want to participate have demonstrated a bondage, quietly invite others to observe and reflect on what they saw. While participants are still in the bondage posture, invite others in the group to one by one move towards someone "in bondage" and offer a simple motion or gesture—without words—that might "unmime" that person's bondage.

You and the other leader should not tell participants what to do. They will be creative enough on their own. Assure them that, while we cannot truly understand another's bondage (even if we use words) nor can we take away the person's pain, we can care, watch and listen, and offer a response.

In the discussion that follows the miming and unmiming, invite participants to tell how they were comforted, surprised and freed. Allow ample time for participants to debrief this experience thoroughly.



Have participants look at this section in their participant resources. Note the during-the-week activities suggested. Ask for questions or comments.

Preparing for a Visit Next Time

It is very important that participants be prepared for the visit in the next session. This visit will be different from other visits in the *Connections* program. It will be a meal shared together at the home of a participant.

With the participants, share the information given in the "Connecting with Daily Life" section in the next session.



Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session. The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John's Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use "Connecting with Scriptures."

Session Three

Eating and Intimacy

The Supper and Nourishment The Sacrament of the Altar

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Understand more fully the meaning of the Sacrament of the Altar and their participation in it.
- Comprehend the Means of Grace as ongoing nourishment.
- Be in awe of God's otherness and God's closeness in Christ.
- Recognize not only their unworthiness but also God's gracious presence in their relationships with God and each other.
- Approach the altar to partake of the sacrament frequently.
- Be able to invite to the meal people who stay away out of fear, guilt, apathy or neglect.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather

Beginning Where We Are

When all participants have arrived, ask them to talk about the past week. If they shared their faith with another, invite them to talk about the experience. How did they feel? What was comfortable about the experience? What was uncomfortable? In what ways did sharing their faith make them feel free?

Ask participants to turn to the questions in the section "Beginning Where We Are" in the participant resource, and to jot down brief notes in response to the questions suggested by the illustration.

This conversation does not need to be particularly deep initially; it is simply a way to connect with participants' lives.

After talking about these questions for a few minutes, move to a conversation about participation in Holy Communion. Allow time for broad expression of various experiences. The question about feasting and fasting, while interjecting a new subject, connects with the two previous questions.

The conversation begins at the concrete, experiential level, with a discussion about who participants enjoy eating with and why. But it may quickly move to a deeper level, one that is filled with paradox. Some participants are able to deal with the complexity and subtlety of paradox. Others will want to continue the conversation at the concrete, specific level. Some may talk only about eating with people and going to Holy Communion. Others will notice the symbolism, irony and paradox in the conversation.

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating. *The Small Catechism* section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.

Connecting With the Faith



Connecting With Daily Life

In the intimacy of eating together, much can be learned about the relationship between sharing a meal of physical food and sharing in the body and blood of Jesus through Holy Communion.

Follow the information and suggestions in the Introduction to this Leader Guide to arrange and prepare for the visit. Even though this is a different kind of visit, the format and kinds of questions to consider still apply. Be sure to include the questions in the participant resource in the conversation during the visit.



Experiencing Until Next Time

Point out the suggestions in this section of the participant resource. Suggest that participants particularly try to share a meal with someone different and think about that experience as it reflects the meaning of the Lord's Supper.



Growing Together

Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session. The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Connecting With Scriptures

Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John's Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use "Connecting with Scriptures."

Session Four

United in Time and Space

Being One Body The Sacrament of the Altar

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- **Comprehend the vast community of saints, the Body of Christ, with whom they are connected, historically and globally.**
- **Understand the many ways they exclude people from the table.**
- **Feel welcomed at God's table and welcome others there, even and especially those very different from themselves.**
- **Recognize their resistance to communion and appreciate its blessings more fully.**
- **Invite at least one person to the communion of Christ.**
- **Develop skills in gathering people different from each other to listen and learn from one another.**

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.



When all have arrived, ask participants to talk about their experiences in the past week. With whom did they share meals? Use the questions in the participant resource as a conversation guide.

The activity described in the participant resource is a brief guided imagery. You may want the participants to read it before you lead them in the imagining so that they know what it is about and what to expect.

Ask group members to get comfortable in their seats and close their eyes. Read the “Beginning Where We Are” description of the table and the people around it. Pause for about 15 seconds after each sentence to allow people to imagine the table and the people. Allow about 15 seconds of silence at the end.

Invite people to open their eyes when they are ready. Ask people to talk about the experience (as much as they are comfortable) either in pairs or in the total group. Ask especially about the people that they found hardest to welcome and the times when they felt unwelcome, even at the Lord's table.

Talk about the responses they heard that helped them to understand the connection between Holy Communion and daily life.

If there is time, talk about the shape of the table. How is that an important first step in signaling who has power and who does not? How might the shape of the table at Holy Communion affect interactions among people at the table?

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating.

The Small Catechism section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.



Connecting With the Faith



Connecting With Daily Life

Activity One: Uniting with Every Time and Place

Have on hand copies of your congregation's worship book. Divide the group into several smaller groups of three or four. Give each group several copies of the book.

Ask participants to turn to the Eucharistic Prayer (also known as the Prayer of Thanksgiving) and look for words, phrases and sentences that refer to the past, the present and the future.

Ask participants to consider this question: How are you personally connected to the people of God of every time and every place? Suggest that they name specific examples from their daily lives.

Talk about the questions in the participant resource.

Activity Two: Looking at Tables

Summarize the instructions for this activity from the information in the participant resource. Consider tables both symbolically and physically.



Experiencing Until Next Time

Sit Around

Together with the participants, review the material in this section of the participant resource. Suggest that participants talk with each other (in pairs or small groups) about ways they might carry this out.



Connecting With the Congregation

Review this section with participants. Suggest that they talk about the questions listed there with others in the congregation. They might also consider how participating in Holy Communion connects them with the mission and ministry of those around the many other tables in the church, even when they are apart.

Preparing for the Visit Next Time

Remind participants about the visit during the next session. Give all the details and arrangements for the visit.



Growing Together

Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session.

The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Connecting With Scriptures

Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John's Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use "Connecting with Scriptures."

Session Five

Free to Confess

Release from Bondage

The Office of the Keys and Confession

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Understand that they are free to confess and to live in the forgiveness of sins.
- Clarify the place of confession in the life and ministry of the Church.
- Feel the need for confession.
- Enjoy the freedom of forgiveness and liberation from bondage.
- Participate in confession and absolution in public and private ways.
- Carry out the ministry of the priesthood of all believers by hearing confession and proclaiming forgiveness as appropriate in the places of their daily lives.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.

Beginning Where We Are

When all have arrived, ask participants to talk about their experiences during the past week. What “tables” did they observe? What relationship did they notice, if any, between those tables and the table of Holy Communion?

Remind participants of the brief imagining in which they engaged during the last session. (They imagined a particular table with particular guests.) Suggest that they close their eyes and think about that table again. Slowly read the questions in the participant resource illustration to them, allowing several seconds after each so that they can recall the table and the guests there.

After you have finished reading the questions, have participants open their eyes and talk about the experience. Engage the group in conversation around any or all of the questions in the participant resource. Sin is an everyday occurrence, and confession is healing and power for new life.

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating. *The Small Catechism* section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.

Connecting With the Faith



Connecting With Daily Life

Activity One: Making a Workplace Visit

Follow the information and suggestions in the Introduction to this Leader Guide to arrange and prepare for the visit.

This visit focuses on repentance and forgiveness in the workplace, subjects that may be both necessary and difficult for participants and those whom they visit. One way to begin the conversation during the visit might be to look at the tables present in the workplace (to continue the conversation about the eucharistic table). Ask questions such as: What tables do you see in the place? How does God gather people to those tables? What work is done there? How does God extend the creative work done there beyond this workplace?

During the visit and the conversation following the tour, help participants focus especially on the problems at the workplace that need forgiveness and new life. Notice the extent to which people go to deny problems or conceal pain (for example, conspiracies of silence, covering of backsides). Be open to insights and possibilities for changed behaviors.

Ask the questions in the participant resource. You might also include questions such as: How is the host a priest here? How do others serve as priests to the host? In what ways are you a priest to the host and to others?

Activity Two: Reflecting on Your Workplace

Look at the opening paragraphs in the participant resource in the description of this activity. Invite participants to comment on the section, then ask them to consider the questions there. Note that in the case of those whose place of work is the home or who are students or retired, *workplace* will be that place in which persons spend most of their time and are most involved in activities.

Optional Activity: Miming Bondages

If you did not use the Miming Bondages activity from Session Two, or want to complete it, this session's content is well-suited for this activity. For directions refer to Session Two of this Leader Guide.



Experiencing Until Next Time

This section suggests opportunities for seeking private confession and for serving as one to whom another confesses." (An alternate, offering to be a confessor, is also outlined.) Ask participants to think about the ways in which they could benefit from confessing long-standing guilt, putting real or imagined grudges behind them, redeeming a relationship or starting over with a colleague, friend or family member.



Connecting With the Congregation

This section suggests conversation about the power of confession and absolution when applied to conflicts and struggles within the Body of Christ. Engage participants in conversation to talk about how conflict is not unusual in faith communities. It is real. So is the gift of reconciliation in Christ. However be clear about what is and what is not the role of this *Connections* group in a specific conflict in the congregation.



Growing Together

Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session. The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Connecting With Scriptures

Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John's Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use "Connecting with Scriptures."

Session Six

Ages and Stages

Faith for a Lifetime

Morning and Evening Prayers; Grace at Table

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- Examine their life of faith and understand how God has been connecting the chapters of their lives.
- Appreciate God's revelation, redemption and continuing care in their lives.
- Anticipate God's loving activity in their lives in the future.
- Share regularly with others God's grace for them.
- Review learnings from their *Connections* experience.
- Understand how people change and grow in their perceptions of God throughout the life cycle.

Going to the Heart of the Matter

This opening sets the tone for the session. Participants may read this online before they gather for the session or the leader or a participant may read it at the beginning of the session. This material can also be shared with the broader faith community as a way to keep them connected to the activities of this *Connections* group. Participants can reflect upon this material before and between sessions face-to-face or through electronic communication. Look to the participant resource for the specific focus for this session.

Beginning Where We Are

When all have arrived, ask participants to look at and respond to the questions in this section of the participant resource. How have participants engaged in the process of private confession over the past days? What have they learned from the experience?

Next engage the participants in a conversation thinking about where they are in the life cycle, using the questions in the participant resource. The group has been together sharing many things about themselves and their worlds, perhaps without focusing on the different ages among them. That's healthy. In this session they have the opportunity to consider how God's love remains constant while we go through all sorts of changes. The leaders' guide section "Connecting with Daily Life" provides more on this subject.

In responding to the first question, encourage participants to use any image they choose. For example, one woman in middle adulthood describes herself as "Act two, scene one." Encourage appreciation for one another as they not only speak about their ages and stages but also respond to the other two questions.

Discussion on the foundations of the Christian faith during this part of the session can be deep and invigorating. *The Small Catechism* section can be read in the session by one person or all together as prelude to *The Large Catechism* and the questions.

- Have one or more people read *The Large Catechism* aloud.
- Use the reflection questions to stimulate discussion.
- Refer back to words from the catechisms during the session to connect in additional ways.

Connecting With the Faith

Connecting With Daily Life

Activity One: Ages And Stages

The purpose of this activity is to explore the way people respond to faith at each stage of their lives. In particular, it will assist participants as they reflect on their life of faith from a developmental perspective.

Use the following comments about each stage from a faith perspective for your information.

Young Adults

“Young adulthood may be the prime time for honest affirmations of faith which are clearly tied to public commitments to be in ministry in and through the church as an institution. Such commitment will not take place unless the exploration of the church’s claims and promises can be undertaken in an environment of openness and trust. No expression of doubt can be off-limits. No thoughts concerning new ways to be in ministry should be rejected without genuine consideration.” (From *Models of Confirmation and Baptismal Affirmation*, by Robert L. Browning and Roy A. Reed. Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1995, page 162.)

Affirmation of Baptism (usually during adolescence, when teenagers are least able to assume responsibility for their faith) does not need to be a one-time experience. Young adulthood is a challenging time — a time when people often leave the church. Congregation members may resent the fact that young adults step

outside the church, rather than seeing it as a time of searching faith that is essential for mature faith.

The exit from church does not need to be inevitable. In reality, young adults may need the church most at this time of their lives. It can be a place of roots in tradition, understanding during exploration and interest in their journey.

Young adulthood is a time of major decisions about sexuality, family, work, community involvement and politics. Young adults are looking for challenge, acceptance and support. *Connections* can be a place for the young adult to be taken seriously as an adult among adults of various ages and stages of faith.

Ask how this congregation might reach out to young adults, including starting a new *Connections* group that seeks their presence intentionally.

Middle Adults

Some middle adults will be settling down after years of challenge, exploration and questioning. Their faith may become, once again, quite traditional. Or they may be incorporating their personally claimed beliefs with the perspectives of others. They may now hold beliefs in paradox as they never could before.

Some middle adults do not face a challenge to their conventional belief systems until a crisis in marriage or work. A new level of mature faith may be a “pilgrimage that cannot get underway until the person feels enough internal security to allow genuine diversity of belief and

action to be internalized. The middle adult’s quest for a renewable quality of life can be met with ministry within the church that balances mental, emotional and physical dimensions in an interactive way.” (From *Models of Confirmation and Baptismal Affirmation*, Browning and Reed, pages 174-175.)

Connections attempts to do this! Middle adults need opportunities to be engaged experientially, connecting faith and daily life. They want to be self-motivated learners who take responsibility for their own learning.

Ask how a new *Connections* group might provide such opportunities for adults in their middle years.

Older Adults

At each stage of older adulthood, the question is whether one will go forward in faith or shrink back in fear. In 2 Corinthians 5:17-20 the one who is in Christ is a new creation and is an ambassador for Christ. Everyone struggles with faith, but older adults can move beyond paradox toward a universalizing faith that comprehends God’s gracious activity in new, deeper ways.

Western society, which idolizes youth, misunderstands and even abuses older adults. The Christian community provides ways to appreciate each other’s gifts across generational lines. *Connections* can provide this opportunity to connect (literally) across the decades. People need to experience one another across generational lines. The church may be one place where such conversation can happen.

The older adult is still discovering new places of ministry. “Christian religious education takes place in the lives of older adults when their needs interact with the story and vision of the faith community so that growth in knowledge, understanding and transformation can occur.” (From *The Religious Education of Older Adults*, by Linda J. Vogel. Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1984, page 100.)

Ask how older adults could be included in future *Connections* groups.

Activity Two: Remembering Connections

This activity provides an opportunity for *Connections* participants to review the experiences they have had during *Connections*.

Invite participants to talk about every element of their experience in *Connections*, using the questions in the participant resource illustration as a guide. Stress the learnings from the visits, between-session experiences, biblical material, their (new) knowledge of the catechisms and the ways in which participants got to know each other in new ways. Encourage participants to be as specific as possible in their reflections.

Activity Three: An Ideally Connected Day

Have the group reflect on the questions in the participant resource.



Experiencing Until Next Time

Walk About

The suggestions here are especially helpful for groups that have concluded their time together, but they also work with groups coming to the end of this session and continuing to other units. Remind participants that it is in the seemingly small or ordinary elements of life that God works.



Growing Together

Use the material in the participant resource to guide this devotional time which provides a conclusion to this session. Participants may want to share leadership for this part of the session. The more integrated spiritual growth becomes to the experiences of the session, the more participants will connect daily life with faith and worship.



Connecting With Scriptures

Use the participant resource for the specific passages from St. John's Gospel, the Book of Romans and the Psalm. The questions there help participants connect their Bible readings to the themes of this session. Refer back to the Introduction for various ways to use "Connecting with Scriptures."

Connections Overview Chart

	Unit 1 Living Faithfully	Unit 2 Living Confidently	Unit 3 Living Spiritually	Unit 4 Living Freely
Elements	Ten Commandments	Apostles' Creed	Lord's Prayer	Sacraments
Content Themes	Identity and idolatry, work and Sabbath rest, relationships and commitment, death and life, disgrace and grace, and greed and justice	God's nature and work as Creator and Preserver, Protector and Defender, and as Savior. Freedom for ministry, the breath of the Holy Spirit and the life of the church	Prayer and spirituality, power and control, Christ and culture, God's care for the world, forgiveness and forgiving, dealing with life dilemmas	New baptismal beginnings, bondage and freedom, the intimacy of eating together, the Body of Christ in the world, the power of confession and faith for life's stages
Specifically Lutheran Themes	Two Kingdoms (Session 6)	Station and Vocation (Session 4)	Paradox (Session 2)	Christian Liberty (Sessions 2, 4, 5)
Major Activities	Discuss bumper sticker theology, keep a journal, speak faith in weekday words, watch a film, make work-site visits, diagram relationships and engage in a role-play.	Imagine God's creative acts, hear the creation story reversed, depict participants' relationship with Jesus, visit their worlds, share grief experiences, examine stations and vocations as platforms for the Gospel, learn "languages" of faith, assemble montages and reflect on a "paper cup church."	Discover the importance of naming, deepen prayer life, explore different world views, visit group members, examine and make decisions about real-life situations, view and discuss a current film and identify temptations.	Remember Baptism, mime bondages, eat together, visit the work worlds of group members, examine the Eucharistic Prayer, imagine life activities around tables, understand life stages, experience confession and absolution, imagine "an ideally connected day," and remember experiences during this course.
Sessions for Visits	Session 4 Session 5	Session 3 Session 5	Session 3 Session 5	Session 3 Session 5
Connecting With the Congregation	Session 6	Session 6	Session 6	Sessions 4, 5, 6

Connections Concepts and Themes

	Unit 1 Living Faithfully Ten Commandments	Unit 2 Living Confidently Apostle's Creed	Unit 3 Living Spiritually Lord's Prayer	Unit 4 Living Freely Sacraments
Nature of God	What does it mean to have and worship a God? (Sessions 1 and 2)	Images and activities of God Triune God	God's name God's will God's rule	Baptized in God's name Being the Body of Christ
Grace	Law and covenant	Restoration, redemption, reconciliation	A prayer relationship with God Living forgiven	Living free Sacraments as means of grace Freedom to confess
Life/Death	Stealing, killing (Session 4)	Dealing with violence (Session 2) From death to life	The forces of evil (Session 6)	Dying and rising with Christ in Baptism (Sessions 1 and 2)
People of God	Holy work (Session 2) Calling (Session 3)	Stations and vocations	Gifted for ministry (Session 3)	Ministry of the baptized (Session 1) Growth in faith (Session 6)
Church	Worshiping community (Session 2)	Communion of saints (Session 6)	A people at prayer	One body in Christ (Session 4)
Spirituality	Sabbath rest (Session 2)	Relationship to Christ (Sessions 3 and 4) What makes us holy? (Session 5)	What is prayer? Why pray? How do we pray? (Entire unit)	Morning/ evening prayers and table grace as spiritual discipline (Session 6)
Relationships	Commitment and family (Session 3) Lying and maligning (Session 5)	Reconciliation (Session 4) Separation through death (Session 4) Life together (Session 6)	Christ and culture (Session 2) Forgiveness (Session 4) Dilemmas (Session 5)	New baptismal relationships (Sessions 1 and 2) Freedom from bondages (Session 2) Life stages (Session 6)
Justice/Social Issues	Theft and the poor (Session 4) Greed and justice (Session 6)	Environment (Sessions 1 and 2) Violence and evil (Session 2)	Enough bread for all (Session 3) Systematic evil (Session 6)	Individualism (Session 2) Servanthood in society (Session 4)



Living Faithfully

Participant Resource

*Norma Cook Everist
Nelvin Vos*



Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Unit One
The Ten Commandments

1



Living Confidently

Participant Resource

*Norma Cook Everist
Nelvin Vos*



Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Unit Two
The Apostles' Creed

A large, stylized number '2' in a light orange color, positioned to the right of the text 'Unit Two' and 'The Apostles' Creed'.



Living Spiritually

Participant Resource

*Norma Cook Everist
Nelvin Vos*



Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Unit Three
The Lord's Prayer



Living Freely

Participant Resource

*Norma Cook Everist
Nelvin Vos*



Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Unit Four
The Sacraments

